By Dr. Ramona Warren

Imagine climbing into bed for a peaceful night’s sleep, but instead of nodding off,

you begin to feel a crawling sensation – like ants -- running up and down your

legs. Your legs twitch and jerk, and you have unpleasant sensations deep within

the muscles. Only temporary relief is found by moving your legs, walking around

or stretching. Sleep is difficult, and you become more fatigued. Your job,

relationships and normal activities begin to suffer. Your brain is in a constant fog,

and you have difficulty concentrating. Unfortunately, for those who suffer with

Restless Leg Syndrome, this is a common scenario.

Over the years I have worked with many people who have suffered with Restless

Legs Syndrome (RLS), but never had personal experience with it until I married

my husband. It was an eye opening experience (no pun intended -- even though I

did lose a lot of sleep!). His legs would twitch, jump and kick causing his whole

body to jerk. There was no way he could get a good night’s sleep…. and neither

could I!

RLS is considered a neurological disorder and is a fairly common condition. It is

estimated that about 10% of Americans suffer with RLS. RLS is characterized by:

A strong urge to move the legs (sometimes the arms or trunk), usually

accompanied or caused by uncomfortable and unpleasant sensations in the

legs

• Symptoms are worse when resting or inactive

• Symptoms improve with movement, such as stretching or walking

• Symptoms are worse at night, or only occur in the evening or at night

While RLS most often affects those who are middle aged, it can affect people of

all ages. RLS is becoming more common in children, and research is finding

evidence that RLS and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are

connected.

Certain drugs, such as antihistamines, anti-nausea medications and antidepressants,

can provoke RLS. Pregnant women commonly experience RLS, but

the condition typically resolves after birth. Iron deficiency is also related to RLS.

Iron is important in helping get oxygen to the muscles. When iron levels are low,

muscles get less oxygen, which can result in spasms and pain. Other nutritional

deficiencies commonly associated with RLS include magnesium, calcium, folic

acid and vitamin B12.

In an observational study reported in *MedPage Today* in 2013, men with RLS

were shown to have a 40 percent higher risk of total mortality. According to

researchers, “The relationship between restless legs syndrome and all-cause

mortality was stronger for men who had symptoms 15 or more times per month

compared with those who had symptoms five to 14 times per month.” It is

believed disturbed sleep from RLS was one of the main factors contributing to

this increase in mortality.

For those who suffer with RLS, there are simple steps you can take to improve –

and even resolve -- this condition.

1. **MAGNESIUM**. Add magnesium, especially at bedtime. Magnesium is calming

to the muscles and the nerves. It is estimated that over 80 percent of

Americans are deficient in this important mineral. The body needs a balance

of calcium and magnesium. If there is too much calcium and too little

magnesium, it can lead to muscle spasms. Magnesium deficiency can also

lead to high blood pressure, abnormal heart rhythms and even coronary

spasms, which is why those with RLS also have a strong tendency toward

cardiovascular disease and hypertension. To get magnesium from your diet,

make sure to eat a lot of dark green leafy vegetables, spinach, nuts, seeds

and bone broth. If you’re supplementing, reach for magnesium lactate,

magnesium chelate or magnesium glycinate, which are the most absorbable

forms. The recommended daily allowance is 600mg, but you may want to

lower the dosage to 300-400mg if you experience any loose bowels or

diarrhea.

2. **FOLIC ACID**. Increase your intake of folate by eating a diet that includes a

wide range of greens, asparagus, cauliflower, beets and legumes.

3. **VITAMIN B12**. This vitamin is important for many body functions, including

energy production in the cells, and metabolism of proteins and fats. Vitamin

B12 is also important for brain and nervous system function. It is mainly found

in meat, fish poultry, dairy products and eggs. (Nutritional yeast is an option

for vegetarians.) It is best to get vitamin B12 from food sources. If your levels

are low, supplements can be helpful.

4. **HERBS**. Valerian, passion flower, kava and skullcap are calming herbs that

help promote relaxation and support nervous system health. These herbs can

be effective in treating RLS.

5. **IRON.** Check your iron levels. Since some evidence indicates low iron levels

may be associated with RLS, getting blood work done that includes a CBC

and an iron panel can help identify an iron deficiency. If your iron levels are

low, begin increasing your intake of iron-rich foods such as beef liver,

spinach, pumpkin seeds, blackstrap molasses, lentils, kidney beans, sardines

and grass-fed beef. The recommended daily allowance varies. Children 4-8

should get 10mg daily, ages 9-13 is 8mg daily, women 19-50 need18mg per

day, while men 19-50 only need 8mg daily. Lactating women should get

10mg of iron daily. Pregnant women should get 27mg per day. Those 51

years and over should get 8mg daily.

6. **MEDICATIONS**. Check your medications to see if RLS could be one of the

side effects.

7. **CAFFEINE**. Caffeine is a stimulant and can disrupt your sleep. If you suffer

with RLS, try cutting out coffee, teas, colas, chocolate or other products

containing caffeine.

8. **ALCOHOL**. Even though many people claim alcohol helps them fall asleep, it

interferes with the sleep cycle and the overall quality of sleep, which can

cause RLS symptoms.

9. **EXERCISE**. Several studies show exercise can relieve RLS, however too

much exercise can aggravate the condition. Stretching and massaging your

legs before bed can also help.

Fortunately, my husband’s RLS is no longer a problem. To accomplish this, we

first checked his medications (He was taking 10 different medications and now

takes NONE!). We also did saliva testing for his adrenal and male hormones, as

well as a Tissue Mineral Analysis to look for mineral deficiencies. We made diet

and lifestyle changes, and added supplements as necessary. Within weeks, his

restless legs had improved significantly. He now sleeps peacefully...and so do I.

If you are interested in more information on the supplements we use to help with

RLS, or would like to find out more about the nutritional testing we do at

Pathways to Healing, please email us at pathwaysth@gmail.com.