

# REM SLEEP LABS

## Night Terrors

### FAST FACTS

- \* May run in families.
- \* Can happen at any age.
- \* Can last anywhere from 2-20 minutes.
- \* Occurs in stage 3 or 4 of the sleep cycle.
- \* Both genders and races seem to be affected equally.
- \* Can be caused by stressful life events, fever, sleep deprivation, or medications that affect the central nervous system (brain).
- \* Never yell or shake a person experiencing a night terror. Comforting them with a hug or gently restraining them will help.

### REM SLEEP LABS IN YOUR AREA:

- Allsa Viejo
- Tustin
- Torrance
- San Diego
- Westlake Village
- Corona

### Parasomnias

This is a category of sleep disorders that involves abnormal or unnatural movements, behaviors, emotions, perceptions, and dreams that occur while falling asleep, sleeping between sleep stages, or arousal from sleep. These behaviors and experiences are most often infrequent and mild. They may, however, happen often enough to become bothersome to the individual and/or family members where medical attention is required.

The most common type of parasomnias are disorders of arousal, which include confusional arousals, sleepwalking (somnambulism), and night terrors. Experts believe the various types of arousal disorders are related and share some characteristics. These arousals occur when a person is in a mixed state of being both asleep and awake, and usually coming from the deepest stage of non-dreaming sleep. This means the person is awake enough to act out complex behaviors but still asleep and not aware or able to remember these actions.

Parasomnias are also very common in young children but do not usually indicate significant psychiatric or psychological problems. Such disorders tend to run in families and might be made worse when a child is overly tired, has a fever, or is taking certain medications. They may occur during periods of stress and may increase and decrease with good and bad weeks.

### Night Terror

A night terror is characterized by extreme terror and a temporary inability to regain full consciousness. The subject wakes abruptly from slow-wave sleep, usually accompanied by gasping, moaning, or screaming. It is often impossible to awaken the person fully, and after the episode the subject normally settles back to sleep without waking. A night terror can rarely be recalled by the subject. They typically occur during non-rapid eye movement sleep. Night terror generally involves a sudden awakening from sleep, persistent fear or terror that occurs at night, screaming, sweating, confusion, rapid heart rate, inability to explain what happened, usually no recollection of "bad dreams" or nightmares where the subject may have a vague sense of frightening images. This is the most disruptive arousal disorder since it may involve loud yelling and panic; in extreme cases, it may result in bodily harm or property damage by running about or hitting walls. Up to 3% of adults suffer from night terrors and exhibited behavior of this parasomnia can range from mild to extremely violent.



### Night Terror or Nightmare?

Nightmares occur during the dream phase of sleep known as REM sleep. Most people enter the REM stage of sleep sometime after 90 minutes of sleep. The circumstances of the nightmare will frighten the sleeper, who usually will wake up with a vivid memory of a long movie-like dream. Night terrors, on the other hand, occur during a phase of deep non-REM sleep usually within an hour after the subject goes to bed which generally falls into stage 3-4 of the sleep cycle. During a night terror, which may last anywhere from two to twenty minutes, the person is still asleep, although the sleeper's eyes may be open. When the subject does wake up, they usually have no recollection of the episode other than a sense of fear. This, however, is not always the case. Some interviewed patients can remember portions of the night terror, while others can remember the whole thing.

### Treatments of Night Terrors

Night terrors in children usually disappear with adolescence, so standard medical treatment is not necessary. The doctor may advise the parents to adjust the sleep habits of the child to allow for more sleep time, and eliminate stresses in the child's life.

In sever cases of night terrors the doctor may prescribe an antidepressant such as an imipramine (Tofranil) or a benzodiazepine drug called Chlordiazepoxide which relieves nervousness or tension and also treats insomnia.

Night terrors in adults can be treated with medications such as an antidepressant called Tofranil or benzodiazepine drugs such as Klonopin or Valium. Additionally, the doctor may recommend psychotherapy, which is a method of treating emotional problems. In psychotherapy, the patient talks with a therapist about their concerns and problems that may be linked to this sleep disturbance.

For more information on Night Terrors and Sleep Disorders or if you would like to inquire about getting tested, please visit: [www.remsleeplabs.com](http://www.remsleeplabs.com)

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