

Sleep Terrors (Night Terrors)



Overview

This is a sleep disorder that's most common in children. Those who have it wake up suddenly during the night. They can be scared and confused. You may not be able to calm them down.

Causes

We don't know what causes sleep terrors. They can be triggered by stress and by lack of sleep. They can be caused by a change in sleep schedule. They can be linked to medications, mood disorders, fever and other sleep problems. In adults, alcohol can play a role. It's more common in females, and in people who have a family history of this disorder.

Symptoms

Sleep terrors most commonly happen during the first third or half of the night. The person may wake up screaming and confused. They may thrash around and have a fast pulse, heavy breathing, and a wide-eyed stare. This can last from 10 to 20 minutes. Then, they fall back to sleep. Often, they don't remember it in the morning.

Treatment

In most cases, sleep terrors don't need to be treated. Most children eventually grow out of them. You can help by trying to provide comfort during an episode and by reducing stress. Your healthcare provider can give you tips to help manage sleep terrors.