



Helping Teens with Narcolepsy: Overcoming Social, Academic and Emotional Hurdles

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Description

Narcolepsy is a chronic sleep disorder that affects a person's ability to regulate sleep-wake cycles, leading to excessive daytime sleepiness, sleep disruptions and in some cases, cataplexy (a sudden loss of muscle tone). In adolescents, narcolepsy presents unique challenges, not only in terms of physical symptoms but also in academic, social and emotional development. As teens are navigating the pressures of school, friendships and growing independence, managing narcolepsy requires tailored support. Addressing the academic, social and emotional difficulties that narcoleptic teens face is essential for their well-being and success.

One of the most significant challenges teens with narcolepsy face is the impact on their academic performance. The excessive daytime sleepiness that comes with narcolepsy can make it difficult to stay awake and alert during school hours, leading to missed information, difficulty concentrating and poor memory retention. This can cause delays in completing assignments, lower grades and a general sense of academic frustration. Additionally, narcolepsy-related symptoms such as sleep paralysis and different dreams can further disrupt their ability to rest at night, compounding the daytime fatigue.

To help teens succeed academically, accommodations can be made in the school environment. This may include extra time for tests, more

frequent breaks or the ability to take naps during the day when needed. In some cases, online classes or flexible school schedules might be beneficial. Encouraging the teen to maintain a consistent sleep schedule, even if they need to nap during the day, can help alleviate the worst of the fatigue and improve concentration during study periods. Parents and educators must collaborate to create a supportive learning environment that recognizes and adapts to the student's needs.

To address these challenges, open communication is key. Encouraging teens to talk about their condition with trusted friends and family can reduce feelings of shame and boost understanding. It can also help to educate peers about narcolepsy, explaining the causes and symptoms of the disorder to promote empathy and minimize misunderstandings. Additionally, involving school counselors in supporting social inclusion can help bridge gaps in peer relationships. Teens should be encouraged to participate in activities they enjoy, even if adaptations are necessary to manage their symptoms. It is essential to help them develop strategies to cope with social situations that may trigger their symptoms, such as avoiding overly stimulating environments or learning techniques to manage their emotions.

Addressing these emotional challenges requires a multi-faceted approach. Therapy, particularly Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), can help teens develop coping strategies to manage anxiety, depression and the emotional impact of narcolepsy. Group therapy or support groups specifically for teens with sleep disorders can provide an opportunity to connect with others who share similar experiences, reducing feelings of isolation. Encouraging teens to stay active, whether through physical exercise or hobbies, can also help improve mood and overall emotional well-being.

Conclusion

Narcolepsy presents significant academic, social and emotional challenges for adolescents. However, with the right support, teens with narcolepsy can overcome these difficulties and lead fulfilling lives. By offering academic accommodations, supporting open communication and providing emotional and psychological support, caregivers, educators and medical professionals can help teens with narcolepsy thrive. Encouraging a positive outlook and helping them build resilience is key to their success, both in managing their condition and in navigating the complexities of adolescence.

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