

## Night Terrors

Night terrors (Pavor Nocturnus) is a sleeping disorder in which a person will suddenly awaken from his/her sleep in a terrified state. Night terrors are commonly misconstrued as nightmares, but there are many key differences that separated the two sleeping disorders.

When a person sleeps he/she usually goes through five different stages of sleep: stages one, two, three, four and REM sleep. Nightmares typically occur in REM (rapid eye movement) sleep, while night terrors occur in stages 3 or 4, which are also referred to as deep sleep. While in deep sleep, a person has no eye movement or muscle activity and is very difficult to wake up. When a person is experiencing a night terror they appear to be awake, but they are actually in this deep sleep, which makes waking them almost impossible. Unlike nightmares, which usually occur in the early morning, night terrors occur in the first third of the night.

When experiencing a night terror, a person suddenly awakes from their sleep confused, screaming, sweating and in a state of terror. A person will typically have a rapid heart rate, be difficult to comfort and will not recognize you. In many cases that person will not even acknowledge another person's presence. An episode can last anywhere from five minutes to thirty minutes and unlike nightmares, a person rarely remembers anything in the morning.

Rather than trying to wake a person who is experiencing a night terror, it is better to try to comfort them and return them to sleep once the night terror is over. People

experiencing night terrors do not know what they are doing, so it may be a good thing to move all objects away from that person that could be harmful. If you are going to wake a person experiencing a night terror, you want to do it gently so that the person does not become increasingly scared and agitated. Again, it is advised that the person not be woken up, but rather be put back to bed once the episode passes.

Night terrors run in families and usually occur in children ages two to six, but also occur in adults. The sleeping disorder can be caused by stress, fever, lack of sleep or alcohol consumption.

Night terrors usually do not require treatment because people tend to outgrow them. The best way to avoid them is to reduce your stress, stick to a routine sleeping schedule and not consume alcohol before going to bed. If night terrors are experienced on a regular basis, psychotherapy or counseling becomes an option.

A person waking up in the middle of the night screaming is without question a scary event. It is important to remember that this person is not awake and that it is better to offer help and reassurance rather than get frustrated. If you do experience a night terror it is most likely brought on by some factor that you can change. Night terrors can be scary, but if you know what to do and how to act when someone is experiencing one, it will make you feel more comfortable and in control of the situation.

### Work Cited

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