

Somnambulism Encyclopedia Article

Somnambulism

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Somnambulism

Also known as sleepwalking, a common disorder among children that involves getting out of bed and moving about while still asleep.

Somnambulism, or sleepwalking, affects an estimated 15% of children in the early school years. It is similar to pavor nocturnus (**night terrors**) in that it occurs during the non-dreaming stage of sleep, usually within an hour or two of going to bed. The sleepwalking child feels an intense need to take action and may appear alert, purposeful, or anxious as he moves about. For many years, people believed that it was dangerous to waken a sleepwalker, but there is no basis for this view. There is, however, little reason to waken a sleepwalking child, and it may be impossible to do so. Sleepwalking children should be gently guided back to bed, and will usually be cooperative in this effort. Episodes of sleepwalking may be signs of a child's heightened anxiety about something. Parents should give careful consideration to events and environmental changes that may have triggered the onset of sleepwalking. If sleepwalking is common among family members, it is more likely that the child may respond to even slight increases in anxiety with sleepwalking behavior.