Rhythmic Movement Disorders – repetitive movements at sleep onset

What is rhythmic movement disorder?

This term refers to head banging, head rolling, body rolling, body rocking and other repetitive movements. This will usually occur at sleep onset, but has been known to occur during other stages of sleep on rare occasions. The most common form is head banging/rocking, which consists of a forward and backward movement onto a pillow, wall or cot-side. This is sometimes accompanied by humming. Episodes typically last 15 minutes, but can in some instances last a lot longer. This behaviour is fairly common in young children, but will usually cease when the child reaches 3 - 4 years. The reason for this type of behaviour is not known, but it is thought that it might help facilitate sleep in some children.

Can anything be done to prevent it?

Treatment is not normally required. The exceptions are if there is a high risk of injury, there is disruption to the rest of the household, embarrassment for the child, or if it is significantly disrupting the child’s sleep.

Preventative measures include:

- Good Sleep Hygiene (see related information document, 1047).
- Ensuring the child is not spending long periods of time in bed awake at bedtime.
- Behavioural interventions, such as reward systems. The use of star charts is sometimes appropriate.
- Occasionally the use of medication, such as benzodiazepine, can be used in the short term.

References


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Every effort is made to ensure accuracy, but Cerebra does not guarantee the adequacy of information given and makes no representations, recommendations or warranties on the basis of it. Seek professional advice before embarking on any therapies or entering into any agreement.

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