Narcolepsy at a Glance
Sleep is essential to overall health and well-being. Individuals spend an average of 26 years of their lives asleep, 7 years trying to fall asleep, and 33 years in bed, but this is not always the case with narcolepsy.

Narcolepsy is a chronic neurological disorder that affects the brain’s ability to regulate sleep-wake cycles, resulting in excessive daytime sleepiness and, in many cases, cataplexy (sudden loss of muscle tone, which can be triggered by strong emotions). Up to 200,000 individuals in the United States have narcolepsy:

- Narcolepsy Type 1 (NT1) occurs with excessive daytime sleepiness and cataplexy
- Narcolepsy Type 2 (NT2) occurs without cataplexy

One study found women were diagnosed with narcolepsy 28 years after symptom onset — 12 years longer than men.

The Impact on Women
Narcolepsy symptoms often begin during adolescence but can go unrecognized for years before a diagnosis.

Sleep disorders, like narcolepsy, differently affect women due to natural biological processes like menstruation, pregnancy, and menopause, as well as social roles, like caregiving.

Women and Narcolepsy
Addressing key gaps in clinical care, education, and policy for narcolepsy could improve outcomes and livelihoods of women living with narcolepsy.

Caregiving and Narcolepsy
Whether for an adult or child, caring for someone with narcolepsy can significantly impact your daily life, health, and finances.

Read Tammy’s caregiver story: Acknowledging the Dual Realities of Parent and Caregiver: A Mother’s Journey with Her Daughter’s Narcolepsy

Pregnancy and Narcolepsy
Women with narcolepsy who are planning for a family should have early conversations with a care provider about their health and considerations for pregnancy. Topics for discussion may include:

- Treatment modifications
- Potential complications
- Strategies for motherhood

Download SWHR’s fact sheet: Narcolepsy and Maternal Health

Narcolepsy Organizations:
- Hypersomnia Foundation
- National Sleep Foundation
- Project Sleep
- Wake Up Narcolepsy

Additional Resources:
- Guide to Drowsy Driving
- Narcolepsy 360 Podcast
- Narcolepsy Safety Guide
- Pediatric Hypersomnia Survey

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Learn more at swhr.org