



# Rutland Regional Medical Center

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## **Sleep & Dreams**

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### **Why do we dream?**

There are 2 theories about why we dream. The first theory is that dreams reveal connections between present feelings and past experiences. The second theory is that the dreams we have through the night have an effect on our waking state of mind.

### **How frequently do humans dream?**

All humans dream throughout the night, approximately every 90 minutes of the major sleep period. There are 3 to 5 such episodes in a 7 to 8 hour night.

### **Do animals dream?**

All animals have cycles of REM or dream sleep. Although language is required to report a dream, it has been shown that monkeys have visual experiences during REM sleep from experiments carried out in the space program.

### **Do men and women have different dreams?**

Studies of differences in the dreams have shown remarkable stability in the face of major social changes over the years. The dreams of men and women reported that men have more outdoor settings in their dreams, whereas dreams of women are more often set in an interior location. Men have more hostile and aggressive interactions in their dreams, whereas women have more friendly interactions.

### **Does the nature of our dreams change as we age?**

Dreams appear to reflect our emotional concerns; therefore, it is not surprising to find that elderly have more dreams of the past and more dreams concerning physical health.

### **How does a nightmare differ from a dream?**

A nightmare is defined as a dream that is frightening enough to awaken the sleeper. Although nightmares are common in children, they tend to reduce in frequency as children grow. Nightmares increase in frequency after stressful events and are a symptom of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD.)

### **How does a night terror differ from a nightmare?**

Nightmares occur during REM sleep. Night Terrors occur during NON-REM sleep and are not bad dreams. They are most commonly caused by a disturbance in a child's sleep pattern (later bedtime, new home, different time zone, etc)

### **Is a sleep walker acting out his or her dreams?**

No. As with night terrors, most childhood sleep walkers are aroused early in the first or second cycle of non-dream sleep, before dreaming has taken place.

### **Can a dream be changed by the dreamer?**

For the most part, dreams appear to have a life of their own beyond the dreamer's control. Some people have the ability to observe that they are dreaming. This is called lucid dreaming.