



THE OFFICIAL NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS

AAP News

Sleep specialist urges pediatricians to keep eyes open for narcolepsy

by Carla Kemp, Senior Editor



Editor's note: For more coverage of the 2020 AAP Virtual National Conference & Exhibition, visit <https://www.aapublications.org/news/2020/08/21/nationalconference2020>.

Don't assume that a child or adolescent who comes to your office complaining of being tired all the time is on his smartphone until all hours of the night, is overscheduled or is depressed.



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Your patient may have hypersomnia.



"I see patients every week who are told they should go to bed earlier and turn off technology and that will be helpful. And in fact, there's no truth to the fact that that's driving their hypersomnia," said Michael J. Strunc, M.D., director of the Divisions of Pediatric Neurology and Sleep Medicine at Children's Hospital of the King's Daughters in Virginia.

Dr. Strunc aims to raise pediatricians' awareness of the sleep disorder during a session titled "Wake Up! Recognition and Management of Hypersomnia," which can be accessed [via the virtual platform](#) through Jan. 31, 2021.

During the session, he focuses on narcolepsy, which he describes as "incessant, consistent and worsening sleepiness" that affects about one in 2,000 people. He describes two types of narcolepsy, the most common of which presents with cataplexy.

Despite its devastating effects on quality of life, narcolepsy often is missed in both children and adults. Studies suggest that it takes an average of 10 years to diagnose the disorder in adults, and they will see four to six providers before finding out what's causing their fatigue.

Dr. Strunc said his patients often have symptoms for years before coming to him. In the meantime, they may struggle in school, withdraw socially and become depressed.

"When we make that diagnosis and I treat them, they are quite literally almost born again. They are back to the person they may have been before this," he said.

That transformation and parents' gratitude spurs Dr. Strunc to educate pediatricians on how to identify hypersomnia early and prevent patients from losing years of their life.

"Disorders of hypersomnia are not as rare as you might think," he said. "It's very, very easy for us to miss hypersomnia because ... the symptoms can be sneaky and we often ascribe sleepiness to other things, most commonly poor sleep hygiene."

During the session, he discusses how to differentiate hypersomnia from fatigue due to lack of sleep. He also suggests steps pediatricians can take if they suspect hypersomnia, including administering the Epworth Sleepiness Scale in Children and Adolescents and referring to a sleep specialist.

"Since it takes often years and multiple people to make a diagnosis of disorders of hypersomnia, you can be a force for good," he said.



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Dr. Strunc also presents "Neurology Potpourri: Evaluation and Management of Common Complaints," which can be accessed via the virtual platform through Jan. 31, 2021.