

Disorders of Hypersomnolence in the Classroom

Narcolepsy and idiopathic hypersomnia are both considered disorders of hypersomnolence. These disorders are lifelong sleep disorders that cause excessive daytime sleepiness. Students with disorders of hypersomnolence often have difficulties in the classroom.

Information about Hypersomnolence

- Students with hypersomnolence can feel and appear very sleepy during the day and may have trouble staying awake in the classroom.
- Some younger children with hypersomnolence may appear to have excess energy, trouble paying attention, or trouble regulating their emotions.
- Children with hypersomnolence will feel very sleepy during the day, even when they have had what others would consider a full night of sleep.

Signs and Symptoms of Hypersomnolence

- Excessive daytime sleepiness, even after sleeping the previous night
- Falling asleep in the classroom
- Having “microsleeps” in which the brain is essentially asleep for a brief period of time. These often appear to be attention lapses, both to the student and the teacher.
- Cataplexy, which is a sudden loss of muscle tone often triggered by strong emotion such as laughter or fear.
 - Cataplexy can be more obvious, such as knees buckling and a student falling. Or it may be more subtle, such as a drooping face.
- Sudden weight gain
- Low energy level

Hypersomnolence in the Classroom

- Students with hypersomnolence often experience challenges that can impact their classroom performance. This may include difficulties with:
 - Concentration
 - Memory
 - Comprehension
 - Processing speed
 - Mood
 - Behavior
- Some students may try to compensate for their sleepiness by engaging in certain behaviors:
 - Fidgeting
 - Moving about the room
 - Excessive talking

(continued)

Classroom Accommodations

- Similar to ADHD or learning disorders, hypersomnolence can be considered a hidden disability. Students with hypersomnolence often are legally entitled to academic accommodations.
- Each child has individual needs, but some academic accommodations may be beneficial in helping students with disorders of hypersomnolence succeed.
 - A scheduled, brief nap (15–30 minutes) in a quiet, private location
 - Opportunities to take a brief walk or engage in physical activity when feeling sleepy
 - Subtle cuing of the student to re-engage attention if they are having attention lapses or microsleeps
 - Extra time for test completion
 - Reduced homework assignments to permit more opportunity for rest outside of school
 - Abbreviated school days
 - Later starts to school days to permit extended nighttime sleep

Disorders of hypersomnolence, including narcolepsy and idiopathic hypersomnia, are lifelong conditions that can impact cognitive, academic, and emotional functioning. Hypersomnolence often affects students' classroom performance. This may include students falling asleep in class, but there may be more subtle effects such as microsleeps, attention lapses, or excessive activity. Teachers can provide support and accommodations to help their students with hypersomnolence experience academic success.
