



## What is Hypnic Headache?

Hypnic headache syndrome is a rare primary headache disorder which usually affects people over 50, although it can start from the age of 40 onwards. There has been little research into the condition compared to some other headache and migraine disorders.

### **What are the symptoms?**

- Hypnic headaches occur exclusively at night, waking you from your sleep at the same time, usually between 1 and 3 am.
  - Condition has the nick name “alarm clock headache”
- The pain can be unilateral (on one side of the head) or bilateral (on both sides of the head).
  - Some people describe the pain as throbbing although not everyone experiences this.
- Pain begins abruptly and can last from 15 minutes to 6 hours, although typically it is about 30-60 minutes.
- Hypnic Headache is more common amongst women than men.
- Pain is not associated with autonomic features (such as a blocked nose or watering eyes)
  - Similarly, nausea, photophobia and phonophobia are not usually associated with hypnic headache.
  - If you have hypnic headache you should be able to go back to sleep when the pain subsides
  - Can experience more than one attack per night.
  - Can experience 15 or more attacks per month.

### **Diagnosis**

- Often diagnosed in patients with history of other headache types
- A doctor will need to take a full history of your sleep patterns and night time habits (including snoring and restlessness).
  - This helps exclude secondary causes of headaches which start at night.
  - These causes include drug withdrawal, sleep apnoea and temporal arteritis (inflammation of the temporal artery).
  - Other primary headaches (such as migraine, cluster headaches and chronic paroxysmal hemicrania) can also wake you at night so these need to be excluded before you can be sure that you have hypnic headache.

### **Treatment**

- lithium carbonate (330 – 600 mg) in combination with caffeine (in the form of cups of coffee).
  - Some people have found they could not tolerate the side effects of the lithium
  - Alternatives: flunarizine, verapamil and indomethacin prophylactically at bedtime