There Are Three Separate States of Sleep and Wakefulness

- **Wakefulness**: Alert and Aware
- **Non-REM Sleep**: Light to Deep Restorative Sleep
- **REM Sleep**: Dreams

Normally, states of sleep and wakefulness occur one at a time in a regular pattern. Most people can:
- Stay awake all day
- Sleep well and switch between non-REM and REM sleep at night

**Several Chemicals in the Brain Affect Sleep and Wakefulness**

Hypocretin is a chemical in the brain that helps people stay awake during the day and prevents non-REM sleep and REM sleep from happening during the day. Histamine is another chemical in the brain that plays a similar role in sleep and wakefulness.

In most people living with narcolepsy, hypocretin levels are low—sometimes too low to be detected. With low or no hypocretin, people are more likely to have cataplexy and severe sleepiness.

**What Happens in People Living With Narcolepsy?**

In narcolepsy, states of sleep and wakefulness shift from one state to another at the wrong time. People living with narcolepsy may:
- Feel sleepy or fall asleep during the day (excessive daytime sleepiness)
- Wake up many times during the night (disrupted nighttime sleep)

The boundaries between sleep and wakefulness may also break down:
- Some aspects of REM sleep can interrupt wakefulness and cause symptoms like cataplexy, sleep paralysis, and hypnagogic hallucinations

Cataplexy happens when the muscle weakness from REM sleep briefly interrupts wakefulness.

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