Overview
Parasomnias are “odd” actions that we do, or unpleasant events that we experience while asleep or while partially asleep. Almost everyone has a nightmare. A nightmare is considered a parasomnia since it is an unpleasant event that occurs while we are asleep.

A person with a parasomnia disorder has more than just the occasional nightmare. And the term parasomnia is much broader than just nightmares. Other common parasomnia events include:

- REM Behavior Disorder (RBD)
- Sleep paralysis
- Sleepwalking
- Confusional arousals

What are common parasomnias?
Typically parasomnias are classified by whether they occur during the rapid eye movement (REM) sleep or the non-REM sleep. The REM sleep parasomnias tend to present as traits of wakefulness while in REM sleep, or as traits of REM sleep while awake. The non-REM sleep parasomnias tend to present as a middle ground where the patient is doing activities but is not fully awake.

REM Behavior Disorder (RBD)
Most dreaming occurs in REM sleep. Normally in REM sleep, most of our body muscles are paralyzed to prevent us from acting out our dreams. In REM Behavior Disorder (RBD) a person does not have this protective paralysis during REM sleep. A person therefore might “act out” their dream. Since dreams may involve violence and protecting oneself, a person acting out their dream may injure themselves or their bed partner. The person will usually recall the dream, but not realize that they were moving in real life.

Sleep Paralysis and Sleep Hallucinations
REM sleep is usually associated with dreams and the body paralyzing most of the muscles so dreams do not get acted out. Sometimes the REM-related paralysis or dream images can occur when falling asleep or when waking up from sleep. Sleep paralysis and sleep hallucinations can occur together or alone. The person is full aware of what is happening. Events can be very scary. An event will usually last seconds to minutes and fortunately end on its own.

Sleepwalking
In sleepwalking, the person is just awake enough to be active but is still asleep so unaware of the activities. Sometimes disorders like sleepwalking are called “disorders of arousal” since the person is in a mixed state of awareness (not fully asleep or awake). Sleepwalking disorders can range from sitting up in bed to complex behaviors such as driving a car. Sleepwalkers are unaware of their surroundings so can fall down or put themselves in danger. Despite the myths, it is not dangerous to wake up a sleepwalker. However the person will not typically have recall of the sleepwalking event and may be confused or disoriented.
**Confusional Arousals**
We all have experienced that strange and confused feeling when we first wake up. Confusional arousal is a sleep disorder that causes a person to act that way for a prolonged period. Episodes usually start when someone is abruptly woken up. The person does not wake up completely and so remains in a foggy state of mind. The person with a confusional arousal may have difficulty understanding situations around them, react slowly to commands or react aggressively as a first response to others.

**What can I do for parasomnias?**
Many people with parasomnias see an improvement by improving their sleep habits. Some sleep healthy sleep tips include:

- Ensure you are getting enough sleep
- Keep a regular schedule of going to bed and waking up
- Avoid alcohol or other sedatives at night that might make it hard for you to completely wake up
- Avoid caffeine or smoking
- Keep the bedroom quiet to avoid getting disturbed

We need to make sure that persons suffering from parasomnias remain safe. Some tips for bedroom safety with a parasomnia include:

- Avoiding large objects that can fall by the bedside
- Make sure there are no objects on the floor that can be tripped over
- Close and lock bedroom doors and windows to ensure a person cannot go outside
- Consider an alarm or bell on the door
- Close shades over windows in case they are hit to protect a person from glass
- Remove potentially dangerous objects and weapons in the bedroom
- Avoid significant elevation. No bunk beds. Consider mattresses on the ground, and ground floor bedrooms.