

Sleepy Students? Use The “HINT” Test!

There are many reasons why students could be falling asleep in classes, including being over-committed (too many classes/too many extracurricular activities), too much partying, roommate problems, stress, irregular hours due to employment while taking classes or acting as the caretaker for a family member, poor sleep habits, etc.).

But excessive daytime sleepiness can also indicate a serious medical condition, such as depression, side effects from a medication, or a sleep disorder. One of those sleep disorders could be **IDIOPATHIC HYPERSOMNIA (IH)**, a chronic neurological disorder.

How can you help your sleepy students? Consider applying the “HINT” test to determine whether a particular student might have IH.

Simply ask:

H How much does the student sleep in a 24-hour period?

Most people with IH usually sleep more than 9-11 hours in a 24-hour period.

I Inertia or grogginess upon waking up?

Many people with IH are very groggy when they try to wake up, and their sleep is very deep, thereby resulting in the need for multiple alarms, reminders or rituals to actually get out of bed. Even when they do awaken, their cognitive skills may be affected.

N Naps—are they refreshing or not?

Most people with IH do not find naps refreshing (in contrast to people with narcolepsy).

T Temporary symptoms, or lasting more than 3 months?

If these symptoms last more than 3 months, then the student should see their doctor or a sleep specialist for further evaluation.

Students also may want to seek academic accommodations, if needed, even while they are pursuing a diagnosis for their persistent sleepiness. The Hypersomnia Foundation has a free, online series of Education Essentials Guides for students that can help with this process, and help students with IH cope (and succeed) in their college careers. These Guides can be found on our website (www.hypersomniafoundation.org), along with lots of other free resources for people with IH.



A Case Study ... from a Parent's Perspective

In 2014, my daughter came home from college for Thanksgiving and as usual, every time I gathered the family for an outing or a meal, she was “missing” – asleep on the couch or in bed.

She had developed an insatiable craving for sleep at age 13, and though she had been examined and tested several times over her teen years by her pediatrician, there was no satisfactory explanation. A sleep disorder wasn't mentioned. This time, I insisted that she see her college health physician when she returned to school. I knew that she liked and respected him. This physician listened to her carefully, and concluded: “You do sleep far too much, you have had these symptoms over a long period, and there is nothing in your health history to explain it.” He sent her for a sleep study at a local hospital.

A night-time sleep study, followed by a daytime test called the MSLT (Multiple Sleep Latency Test) resulted in her diagnosis of idiopathic hypersomnia. It had taken nearly seven years to get a correct diagnosis. We later learned this is not unusual. She began treatment with a local sleep specialist. Eventually, we took her to see Dr. David Rye at Emory University, one of the top IH researchers in the country, to explore cutting-edge treatments.

Through off-label prescriptions of medications (normally used to treat related sleep disorders like narcolepsy), my daughter is able to work full-time, drive safely, and have a fuller social life.

I didn't realize my daughter had been blaming herself for her sleepy symptoms until after she was diagnosed. She told me, “I always thought everyone else felt as sleepy as I did; [and that] I just didn't handle it as well.” So my advice to other parents is, if your child is having problems with their sleep-- don't wait. See your child's physician, and keep asking questions until your child gets a correct diagnosis.

- Name withheld to protect her daughter's privacy

About HF

The Hypersomnia Foundation (www.hypersomniafoundation.org) is a nonprofit patient advocacy group that provides free resources and information for patients as well as medical providers. *All of the information on the site is carefully vetted by the Hypersomnia Foundation's Medical Advisory Board and Board of Directors.* You can also read about treatments and current research studies, view the Medical Provider Directory, and find guides to help students with IH succeed academically.

