



Dr. Henry writes about dreams

Dreams are a very complex subject. In antiquity, dreams were considered visitations from God. In general, dreaming can be viewed as both a physiological and a psychodynamic process. Dreaming is a normal function of REM (rapid eye movement) sleep which in most people occurs every 90 minutes. If awakened during REM sleep, you will likely be dreaming and remember the dream. Simplistically, if you are having frequent dreams, it means that you are having frequent awakenings and are not getting restful restorative sleep. A sleep study is the best way to quantify or objectively evaluate sleep function.

Dream content is an entirely different subject. Sigmund Freud wrote the classic treatise, "*The Interpretation of Dreams*." Freud was an original thinker and a genius in his time. Psychodynamically, dreams are felt to be a window into the unconscious. They are symbolic and thus can be interpreted, usually best by the dreamer, but perhaps facilitated by another person. Freud theorized that dreams had manifest content (that which the dreamer reported), had latent content (symbolic or unconscious meaning), and that dreams could be condensed for meaning (interpreted). He felt that dreams were a mechanism to sort out the day's residue of stimuli and a possible unconscious mechanism for managing anxiety. There is no way that I know to absolutely accurately interpret dreams. They are always open to speculation, but are fascinating to try to interpret. My experience would suggest that most dreams involve some reference to what may have happened to the individual in the previous 24 hours and/or have reference to a significant experience in the past. With PPS which we experience every day, we can all have dreams symbolic about this real stress in our lives and consequently, the reality of PPS can no doubt trigger past symbols of the original polio event and thus we could have dreams back in time about having polio. Some have shared experiences of separation and had dreams (or nightmares) about these old experiences. Also nightmares can be a symptom of post traumatic stress syndrome. When, I was in active practice, I did try to help patients interpret their dreams and it usually proved therapeutic. If you have a dream that seems of significance, tell someone about it as soon as possible or write it down before you forget it. Then, try to look for themes in your dreams and ask a loved one to give you some feedback or ask us on this list [[SJU Polio](#)].

I do not know any particular books that I would recommend about dreams. My wife works for Barnes and Noble book store and there are two titles that might be good, but I have not read them. They are "*Dreaming*" by Derek and Julia Parker (about \$13.00) and "*The Art of Dreaming*" by Carlos Castaneda (about \$12.50).

I would welcome any questions or feedback. I find it fascinating that we old polios are now dreaming in a mixed manner, both nightmarish and insightful. For years, I have had running dreams and other able bodied dreams. The February issue (the one with the nude physically well endowed paraplegic lady on the cover) had an article about the dreams of the disabled. The article was mostly a compilation of disabled individuals experiences with dreams. I found that I am not alone in the types of positive dreams that I have had.

I would add that a fantasy is not a dream, as one can control a fantasy and it is conscious. Also, in the that time period between sleep and being totally awake, many of us (everyone, not just PPSers) may have hypnogogic hallucinations. This can cause the temporary sensation of seeing another person, hearing sounds in the room, smelling of old odors (wet wool?), and all seem very real for a brief time, and this can cause a startle response. This is very common in elderly people and can contribute to their being more confused at night. The elderly do better with a dim light in the room to reduce the severity of this confusion. Hypnogogic hallucinations can also be another sign of restless sleep.

Take care and maybe I will meet you in my dreams,

Henry Holland, Richmond., Virginia, USA. Henry4FDR@aol.com

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