I can't fall asleep when my boyfriend stays the night

Dear Alice,

It is difficult for me to fall asleep when my boyfriend stays the night. I don't have any problem with sharing my bed; we just have a hard time finding a sleeping position that we can both be comfortable in. I was almost able to fall asleep spooning, but having his arm under me for a long time got uncomfortable. I thought maybe we should try minimizing bodily contact, but I have a tiny little twin bed (I'm in a dorm) and that kind of defeats the purpose of falling asleep with him anyway. Any time he stays over, I have to take a huge nap the next day to catch up on my sleep. Any suggestions?

? Sleepless

Answer

Dear Sleepless,

Having enough space to be in a comfortable position for sleeping is important to a good night's rest. A twin bed for two is definitely a challenge. Certainly nothing is wrong with the fact that you can't sleep well when your boyfriend stays over; it does not mean you do not care about him nor that you don't want him there. Sleep, similar to nutrition and exercise, is an essential component of your physical and mental health. You've come to realize that a part of your relationship is challenging to your health, so now, it's just a matter of deciding what to do about it.

Let's explore some options:

- You can do nothing about the current situation, and continue to rely on your nap the following day. Napping is a useful strategy in preventing significant sleep debt, and your body is telling you that you need more quality sleep than what you are currently getting on the nights your boyfriend sleeps over.
- You can find creative ways to have more space when you sleep. Do you have your own room or do you share it with someone else or several other persons? Can you use floor space in your room, for example, and lay down blankets, sleeping pads, and/or pillows to make a comfy rest area on the floor where you two will have more room to get some Zzzz's? Can you replace your twin bed with a double or queen size futon that you can fold up during the day for more living space, or do you have enough room to upgrade the bed itself?
- You can plan to spend nights together in his bed, if it's an option and if it's larger than
yours, rather than bunk up in your cozy twin. If this is a possibility, maybe you can designate nights together at his place.

To explore other possible options, take a moment to think about why it's so important for you two to sleep in the same bed. Is it so that the two of you can have sex? If so, is it possible that when you two are ready for sleep, your boyfriend sleeps elsewhere, either in your room (such as on the floor) or in his bed? Maybe you both like to sleep together so you can share intimate moments. If so, what if you both plan nights in bed to cuddle, say while you talk or watch a movie, but then when it's time for sleeping, you sleep in separate places? It's not an uncommon arrangement, nor is not touching each other during sleep.

Have you discussed this with your boyfriend? Is he having a similar experience of not sleeping well in your bed? If you haven't talked with him about this yet, it may be worth having a chat to let him know you're struggling to sleep well. Sometimes a situation like this can cause anxiety for one or both persons, in which case, raising the issue is a proactive strategy for the health of the relationship. Perhaps you two could devise a new plan that suits both your needs, and opens the door to better sleep together.

Sleeping with another person is a learned behavior. Many of us spend much of our formative years sleeping alone in our own beds, so it's natural to experience some disruption when sharing your bed, especially if it's made for one. Try to enjoy learning how to sleep well with your boyfriend. And remember, it's a process.

Alice!
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