

Sleepwalking associated with drinking? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

Lately, my boyfriend has been sleepwalking. I'll wake up, and he will be sleeping elsewhere — downstairs on the couch, his roommate's room, etc. At first, we thought it was funny. However, now that it has reoccurred (more than once or twice), he is very upset about it. He thinks it is from drinking too much. Could this be the case?

— sleepwalker concerned with drinking

Answer

Dear sleepwalker concerned with drinking,

Sounds like your boyfriend's nighttime strolls are starting to become a cause of concern for you both! Sleepwalking, or *somnambulism*, is the act of getting out of bed and walking around (or performing other activities) while sleeping. Although it usually doesn't indicate a serious disorder, repeated sleepwalking can be a symptom of other issues (not to mention a bit of a disruption for the sleeper and anyone with whom they might be sharing their living space). And to answer your question, your boyfriend's hunch about the alcohol could be getting somewhere, as alcohol consumption is among a number of factors that are linked to somnambulism.

Sleepwalking is considered to be a *parasomnia*, which refers to atypical or unwanted behaviors that occur during sleep. Like other parasomnias, somnambulism is thought to be a result of disordered sleep patterns. During sleep, people generally pass through stages that include rapid eye movement (REM) sleep and non-REM (NREM) sleep, which is divided into N1, N2, and N3 stages. Somnambulism occurs during N3 sleep, the deepest stage of NREM sleep before transitioning into the REM stage. People usually enter the N3 stage within one to two hours of falling asleep. Most of the time, people experience somnambulism for less than ten minutes, but occasionally it can last upwards of thirty minutes or only a few seconds. If left undisturbed, the nighttime wanderer will usually lay back down, but it could be somewhere other than their bed. Sleepwalking is more common in children, as they have more N3 stage sleep than adults.

While sleepwalking isn't a huge cause for concern, it can be a symptom of other disorders or underlying issues. Here are the many factors that could be contributing to your boyfriend's

sleepwalking:

- Travel
- Sleep schedule disruptions
- [Sleep deprivation](#) [2] or fatigue
- [Stress](#) [3]
- Fever
- Anxiety
- Sleep apnea
- Substance use (such as alcohol)
- [Restless leg syndrome](#) [4]
- [Gastroesophageal reflux disease \(GERD\)](#) [5]
- Medical conditions (such as seizures)
- Mental health conditions

List adapted from [Mayo Clinic](#) [6] and [MedlinePlus](#) [7].

If sleepwalking occurs more than a couple of times a week, harms the sleepwalker or others, seriously disturbs the sleep of the sleepwalker or others, causes drowsiness or a negative impact on daytime functioning on the part of the sleepwalker, or occurs after childhood, it could be a good idea to consult a medical professional. They will likely run a few tests and conduct a mental health evaluation to narrow down potential causes.

Many people don't need treatment for somnambulism, as it doesn't always cause enough of a disturbance to be of concern. For those that are concerned, there are a few options they might try. Health care providers may adjust medication, treat any underlying conditions, provide sleeping aids, or refer the sleepwalker to a mental health professional. Individuals could also consider making some lifestyle changes, such as integrating relaxation techniques before bed, reducing alcohol consumption, and rearranging the house to make it safe for a sleepwalker. Given that your boyfriend thought alcohol could be a factor in his sleepwalking, he might want to try reducing alcohol consumption and see if it helps. If it doesn't and he's still concerned, he may want to seek additional help.

Sweet dreams!

Alice!

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[The downsides of sleep deprivation](#) [2]

[When I dream, I feel unrested](#) [13]

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[5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/gastric-reflux-0>

[6] <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/sleepwalking/symptoms-causes/syc-20353506>

[7] <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000808.htm>

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