Nervous or excited bowel movements

Dear Alice,
When I get excited about going to see the boy I love or nervous about hanging out alone with him, I have to poop. Everytime. My stomach gets really upset and it cramps and then I have to poop. In most cases it's diarrhea and I never feel like I'm okay by the time I have to leave. Is there something I can do about it to limit it or just stop it in general? I love knowing that I get to see him but I hate the baggage I get beforehand.

Signed,
Down in the poops

Answer

Dear Down in the poops,

It's understandable that you don't enjoy the rather inconvenient way your body has of expressing its excitement. Although awkward, your desire to poop upon seeing your sweetheart is actually a sort of back-handed compliment. Many people experience "butterflies in the stomach" in response to excitement or nervousness in a vast array of situations. Any fan of Comedy Central's South Park will recall how Stanley would vomit each time he spoke to his crush Wendy, out of the same flustered fondness. Here's what's probably going on: people we love can make us excited or nervous, which our body can interpret as stress, which triggers a whole slew of physiological changes, digestion among them.

When preparing to sprint away from a tiger or fight a bear, it's not in the body's best interest to spend energy on digestion; you need all your blood and energy to fight or flee. So digestion stops, and often the bowels empty. Although your darling is not a physical threat to your safety, your body perceives the shot of adrenaline produced in response to seeing him as stress and readies as if for flight or fight. You might also notice that your heart pounds or that you start sweating more. These are also normal stress-responses.

There are some relaxation techniques that might help you to calm and center yourself before you see your love, and temper your body's reactions. Try a few minutes of slow, deep breathing. While you're doing this, you can picture seeing him and staying calm and collected, training your body to react differently to that excitement. Yoga and meditation can also help retrain the body...
into a pattern of calmness and diminished reactivity. Listening to soothing music can put you in a mellow state of mind before a date. And talking to friends may help you to figure out what you’re so nervous or excited about, and take the edge off. Finally, try to avoid eating foods that could worsen diarrhea, like too many raw salads or fruits, before you see him.

While chronic digestive upset could point to an underlying problem like a food allergy, Crohn’s disease, or Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS), it sounds like your gastric distress is limited to when you see the one you love. If you find this problem coming up (or out) at other times, you might want to see a health care provider. Hopefully some of the relaxation tips can be helpful in easing the intensity of your I-have-a-crush-on-you-jitters. You could also share with your honey (sparing the graphic details) that sometimes you feel nervous when you’re going to spend time together, and see what he says. Chances are you aren’t the only one feeling riled-up excitement, and you can help to calm each other’s frazzled nerves.

Any way you come at it, the beginning of love is exciting, and your body is reacting appropriately, albeit a bit over-zealously, to the buzz of budding romance. Enjoy your crush!

Alice!
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