

## Wet dreams — What's normal? <sup>[1]</sup>

(1) Dear Alice,

Are wet dreams in a sexually active 23-year-old male unusual?

—Voice HAS cracked

(2) Dear Alice,

I only had about three to four "wet dreams" in my entire life and now I'm 20 years old. I wonder if it is normal, or it's because I masturbate often that I don't have these kinds of dreams. Is there a way of having one like that again?

— A Dreamer

(3) Dear Alice,

I have a normal sex life with my wife (once or twice a week), but I have been having a problem lately. I have had about four wet dreams last year. I don't know why but I feel really bad about this. Is there something wrong with me? How can I stop this???

Feeling Helpless

### **Answer**

Dear Voice HAS cracked, A dreamer, and Feeling Helpless,

As you might've gathered from the fact that three of you (and many more!) all have similar questions, you're in good company when it comes to wondering about wet dreams (or "nocturnal emissions"). In fact, men and women have asked this question for hundreds of years and you can rest assured that you'll be spared from the harsh "treatments" of yore (think: castration or an insane asylum). Wet dreams are very common among men (and women [2!]): studies estimate that up to a whopping 83 percent of men and 37 percent of women have at least one wet dream in their lifetime. While wet dreams do tend to be more frequent in teenage years when hormones are coursing through your body, it's not atypical for sexually active adults to experience wet dreams, nor is it atypical for teen or young adults to have very few wet dreams.

All of you touch on whether masturbation or sex has anything to do with the frequency of wet dreams. There is some evidence that men who ejaculate during the day through sex or masturbation may have fewer wet dreams than men who do not. If you're curious to see whether this is the case for you, consider trying an experiment: see what happens if you don't masturbate or have intercourse for a week or two. Maybe a wet dream will occur. Maybe not. Your body knows when and how to best take care of itself in this regard. The good news is that neither masturbation [3] nor wet dreams are harmful to your health, so experiment away.

Feeling Helpless, you mention that you're feeling a bit distressed about your wet dreams. The first thing to remember is that you cannot control your dreams — erotic dreams happen whether we want them to or not — so you needn't feel ashamed. It isn't a sign that you need more sex, or that you don't enjoy the sex you are having. If it's the content that has you worried (e.g., an ex-partner, a new sexual scenario, etc.), remember that dreams and fantasies are ways for us to explore our sexuality without acting on those thoughts. Chances are you've probably also had wacky dreams about non-sexual subjects that have left you baffled [4], right? Dreams are just dreams, wet or dry.

While having more sex or masturbating more often may help reduce your wet dreams, there's no guarantee that they'll stop altogether. If they do continue, you might consider trying to enjoy the experience! Erotic dreams are perfectly normal and healthy, and the orgasms that often accompany them may be a welcome release. If you do find them unpleasant, though, there are a few different strategies you could consider trying for lessening their impact on your life:

- Consider seeing a mental health care provider if they're causing you anxiety or stress, or seeing a couples counselor if you feel like they're damaging your relationship with a partner.
- Have open and honest discussions with your partner about wet dreams. S/he may be more understanding than you expect, and it can give you a chance to talk it out with someone you trust.
- Keep a second set of sleeping clothes next to the bed so you can stage a quick change if you find waking up in a little sea o' semen to be bothersome.
- Check in with your health care provider if you feel like your wet dreams are significantly interfering with your life or quality of sleep, or if you or a partner notices any other sexual behaviors in your sleep.

In the end, what each of you is experiencing — more or fewer wet dreams than expected — is quite normal. So, with that: sweet dreams!

Alice!

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