Difficulties sleeping double in a twin bed

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 and the ability to sleep in a comfortable position is vital to a good night's rest — to that end, a twin bed for two can definitely be a challenge. While it may feel like not being able to sleep with your beau in bed is a sign of trouble in paradise, rest assured it doesn't mean you don't care for him or that you don't want him to be there. Sleep, similar to nutrition and physical activity, is an essential component of your complete health and well-being. You've come to realize that you enjoy spending the night together, but it may not be beneficial for your zzzs. So now, it's just a matter of talking about it with your boyfriend and coming up with some creative ideas for having your cake and eating it, too — or having your sleep and relationship, too!

Before making any decisions, you may consider taking a moment to think about what it means 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? Perhaps he can either find another spot in your room (such as on the floor) or even in his own 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 when it's time for sleeping, you sleep in separate places? It's not uncommon for partners to sleep separately or avoid touching each other during sleep.
If you’re committed to sleeping in the same space, maybe try discussing this with your boyfriend as it may also be impacting his sleep quality. Sometimes, a situation like this can be uncomfortable for one or both persons; keep in mind that raising such issues and being able to have these conversations can lay the groundwork for a healthy relationship. Perhaps you two could devise a new plan that suits both your needs, and opens the door to better sleep together. For pointers on how to start this conversation, check out the Relating & Communicating category in the Go Ask Alice! archives.

Some options to consider as you prepare for a sleep solutions chat with your beau might include:

- Finding creative ways to have more space when you sleep. Do you have your own room or do you share it with another person(s)? If you have your own room, can you use floor space? For example, you can lay down blankets, sleeping pads, or pillows to make a comfy rest area on the floor where you two will have more room to get some zzzs. 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?
- Try planning 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.
- Continue to rely on your nap the following day and take no further action to change the situation. Napping is a useful strategy when you’re trying to prevent significant sleep debt, and your body is telling you that you need more quality sleep than what you’re currently getting.

No matter what you decide to do moving forward, sleeping with another person is a learned behavior. It’s likely that individuals spend much of their formative years sleeping alone in their beds, so it’s natural to experience some disruption when sharing a bed (especially if it’s made for one). Try to enjoy learning how to sleep well with your partner and remember — it's a process.

Alice!
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