When cuddling and sleeping don't mix [1]

Dear Alice,

I would like to be able to cuddle up to my partner at night, but I can't sleep if anyone is touching me even a little bit. I'm very prone to insomnia as it is, so it's hard to practice. Is there a way I can learn to sleep differently?

Signed,

One side of the divide

Answer

Dear One side of the divide,

Aren't lovers supposed to want to stay together “till death do us part”? No, not necessarily; sometimes, two people just need their space. Fortunately, this all-too-common dilemma has a fairly simple solution. While it may be nice to get cozy with one another along the road to dreamland, there is no rule that states "bedmates must stay connected at all times". Perhaps you and your partner could have cuddling time when you first get into bed, with a guilt-free understanding that afterwards, you'll go your separate ways when it's time to count sheep.

If you're looking to get used to your cuddling companion, perhaps you could practice during waking hours. Snuggling up on the sofa when reading or watching TV, on the train, or at the movie theater are some suggestions. Doing so might give you some practice and/or satisfy your desire to be physically close, but still comfortable. Another thing to consider is your degree of contact when the two of you are in bed. Is your partner all over you like a fitted sheet, or is s/he just resting a hand, arm, or leg across a small part of your person? The latter will give the two of you some contact and still allow you some "breathing room."
You might be interested in reading a few Q&As in the Sleep category of the Go Ask Alice! General Health archives for suggestions that might be useful to you. You may find it helpful to talk to your health care provider about ways to improve your sleep patterns. Patience may also be in order here — getting used to sleeping and touching together can take the time of many a mattress rotation.

Alice!
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