Noisy dorms — Help, I can't sleep! [1]

Hi Alice,

I cannot sleep in my dorm room. It is always loud. I have read many articles about sleep hygiene, but no matter how healthy and relaxed I am before trying to sleep, I will wake up whenever there is noise.

I sleep with earplugs, but they do not block out the noise well enough. I wake up exhausted every day and it is seriously interfering with my ability to study, participate in activities, and otherwise enjoy life. I was very happy at my school until I had to move into this noisy room. After a visit to the campus health service, they diagnosed my insomnia as "situational" (due to the room) and recommended that I sleep in a quiet location, but that is not an option as I cannot prevent the noise.

I was not experiencing much stress at all in life until I moved into the room where I could no longer sleep. When I am stressed, I am always able to sleep fine as long as it is quiet; if it is noisy, I cannot sleep no matter how relaxed I am.

Answer

Dear Reader,

Welcome to college, a place of academic excellence, personal growth, and… life in the residence halls. There are many advantages to living in a residence hall, such as meeting dozens of interesting people, collaborating with new friends, and participating in fun activities. However, close living quarters can present some challenges. Living in a raucous environment can be frustrating and lead to sleep deprivation [2]. It’s clear that you've tried a number of strategies to block out the noise around you. Here are some more tips that may help you get a good night’s sleep:

- **Wear noise-cancelling headphones.** Even if you’re not playing music, the headphones can drown out a loud roommate or noises from the hall. Some people find these more effective than earplugs.
- **Use a noise machine.** These nifty devices play soothing sounds and can help drown out outside noise.
• **Turn on the fan.** Similar to the noise machine, a fan can help will help drown out background noise.

• **Talk to your Resident Advisor (RA).** Your RA can speak with the noisy residents and help you sort out any issues with your housing, if you need to relocate.

• **Skip naptime.** Napping during the day can make it harder to fall asleep at night.

• **Go to sleep at the same time every night.** Keeping a regular bedtime can stabilize your circadian rhythm and make it easier to fall asleep.

• **Keep a sleep diary.** Perhaps there is more to this issue than meets the eye. Try keeping a sleep diary for a week or two. This will help you identify other patterns that may be affecting your sleep — either for better or worse.

It seems that you have struggled to get your ZZZs for a frustrating amount of time, so it may also be beneficial to confront the noise perpetrators. You can go directly to whoever is responsible for the noise in a polite and calm manner and kindly ask if they could lower the noise. You can let them know why you need a quieter environment — whether you have to study for an exam, are not feeling well, or can’t sleep. This way they will know that you aren’t just being disagreeable.

In addition to speaking with your RA, it’s good to know your hall’s quiet hour’s policy. If the noise occurs during this time, your RA may be able to report this noisy neighbor to the housing authorities. To build your evidence base, it’s wise to keep a log of when the disruptions occur and the type of noises you hear. Are any other residents bothered by the noise? Perhaps other students can submit complaints as well.

If all else fails, you may want to request a housing transfer and cite the noise as a reason. Again, keeping a log of your sleep, or lack thereof, can help when you state your case. If the spaces are available, university housing will likely be able to accommodate your request. If you cannot move to a different room, is it a possibility to move off-campus? Either way, it’s vital that you find a space that provides the silence and solitude that you need.

Peace be with you!

Alice!

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Sleep

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