Dear Alice.

For the past two weeks, my roommate has been noticing that I talk in my sleep. It’s not that it bothers him, because he’s usually up at night anyway, but it bothers me. I wonder what I say while I am unaware (he never seems to remember) and I wonder why I just started doing this. Things were quiet around here first semester. Is this kind of thing stress-related? (I’ve got plenty of that recently...) Is it random? Am I losing my mind?

Mumbles.

Answer

Dear Mumbles,

Whether you’re singing opera, rambling about the weather, or speaking a mystery tongue, the exact causes of sleep talking can be difficult to pinpoint. Formally known as somniloquy, sleep talking is considered a parasomnia—a fancy word for all the odd or abnormal things we do in our sleep (excluding sleep apnea). Certain factors such as stress, lack of sleep, daytime drowsiness, depression, alcohol and fever are thought to be common catalysts for sleep talking episodes. The good news is that this condition is often short-lived for many people. Next steps may involve talking with your roommate and adjusting a few lifestyle behaviors in your day-to-day to reduce your nighttime noisemaking (see I’m an over-active sleeper? Help! for suggestions).

As far as what you say in your sleep, if your roommate can’t remember it, your midnight musings might not make sense or perhaps you’re not making any substantive speeches (?Four score and seven naps ago??). In any case, keeping the lines of communication open when you’re wide awake may help improve your shared sleeping situation. If it bothers you that your roommate can hear you talking in your sleep, you might chat with him about using a white noise machine, a fan, or earplugs (for him) at night to drown out any sleep soliloquies and in turn, reduce the likelihood that you’ll be heard.

From clear monologues to jibber-jabber and from whispers to shouts, a sleep talker’s speech may be completely unrelated to anything in her/his life and is generally considered to be harmless. However, this type of late night chitchat can also be a symptom of an underlying issue or occur at the same time as another condition, such as:

- Sleepwalking
Mumbles, you mention that talking in your sleep is a relatively new phenomenon for you. It is possible that it may resolve on its own and with it, your worry. However, if your sleep talking becomes severe (meaning it occurs frequently and disturbs your roommate) or it persists, it may be a good idea to speak with your health care provider to further investigate the issue. Whether or not you slumber without a sound, you can still sleep tight and don't let the bedbugs bite!

Alice!

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Related questions

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Resources

Medical Services (Morningside) [13]
Medical Services (CUMC) [14]
a!Sleep website [15]

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