

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid

Condom use among UA students who are sexually active is at an all time high, having increased 32% since 1998. (2008 Health & Wellness Survey, n=1,250)

Q. Is it true that guys wake up erect because they have to urinate and it's not because they want to have sex?

A. Although early morning erections, sometimes commonly referred to as "morning wood," can make urination difficult after waking up, having a full bladder is not their cause. Rather, these erections occur spontaneously and involuntarily, and are linked to rapid eye movement (REM) sleep and testosterone fluctuations in the body.

Research has shown that sleep related erections (SREs) are common in healthy males from infancy to old age and – contrary to popular belief – appear to be largely unrelated to dream content. In fact, studies suggest that SREs have more to do with the body's natural sleep rhythms and self-regulating systems than anything related to stimulating fantasies or a desire for sex.

Studies have even revealed this to be a much wider phenomenon than previously believed, with women experiencing similar clitoral erection cycles during sleep. Furthermore, evidence of SREs in other animals has also been documented, suggesting that this mechanism is common among mammals in general.

As to their purpose, SREs are believed to help oxygenate penile tissue, which in turn protects these sponge-like masses from problems that can lead to erectile dysfunction.

In this way, the body appears to perform its own routine preventive maintenance each night during sleep.

SREs can also be helpful in treating men with impotence, since their presence can help determine if the dysfunction is psychological (e.g. related to sexual anxiety) or physiological in origin. Over time, however, SREs tend to become less frequent, perhaps related to similar decreases in testosterone production and a greater likelihood of sleep disturbances that are common with increasing age.

The bottom line message here for men: in addition to strengthening your immune system, regulating your metabolism, increasing memory retention and managing your mood, sleep may also help your current (and future) sexual health.

For more information on sexual health, sleep and a range of health topics, go to www.health.arizona.edu.



Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

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