



Holding off on number two

Question

Dear Alice,

My boyfriend and I have been together for almost three years, and we've lived together for more than one, but I still can't do Number Two when he's in the house. It's not a problem during the week when we both go to our separate jobs, but on the weekends, it's usually just the two of us in the house all day (and night) Saturday and Sunday and if I feel the need to poo, I have to wait until Monday. My question is this — are there any adverse health issues I should be concerned about with waiting to poo? I know that holding your pee can give you bladder infections, but is there a similar issue with Number Two?

Thanks,

Patiently Waiting

Answer

Dear Patiently Waiting,

What do your poo and your love for your boo have in common? It's best to not hold it in! Ignoring nature's calls can cause more than just discomfort — it may also cause constipation, which may lead to anal fissures and hemorrhoids. As a side note, since you mentioned it: holding in urine does not typically cause bladder infections. Oftentimes, romantic partners might be nervous about pooping when the other is around out of fear of stigma and will deploy tactics to hide the fact that they went to the bathroom. Some people run the faucet to hide the sounds, others may exclusively poop in bathrooms far away from their partners, and a few may even blame the sounds and smells on the dog! But, the reality is, everyone poops — including your boyfriend. So, perhaps it's time to let it go when you gotta go!

Aside from causing an awkward and stressful situation, holding in a bowel movement can lead to uncomfortable and painful constipation. When you eat, your body digests all the necessary nutrients it needs for fuel, including fats, proteins, minerals, and more. Once it's done digesting, your colon's left with stool (fecal matter) that needs to be expelled from the body. At this point, your colon stretches and puts pressure on nearby nerves to signal that you need to go to the bathroom. The longer you ignore nature's call and hold in your stool, the more your colon continues to absorb additional water until the stools become hard, dry, small in size, and difficult to pass. When you're finally ready to do a number two, you're more likely to find yourself straining, suffering from abdominal pain, and feeling bloated. If you're not able to find relief and you continue to remain constipated, you may find it even more difficult to go to the bathroom. In a more extreme situation, if your colon becomes too full, you may experience new soft or liquid stool leaking out around the old hard stool, or if the situation gets worse, you may temporarily lose control over your bowel movements.

Not only does holding it in cause constipation, it can also cause painful effects involving the anus and rectum due to straining to have a bowel movement. These can include hemorrhoids — swollen and inflamed veins

around the anus and lower rectum — which can cause pain, itching, and bloody stools. Similarly, you may put yourself at risk for anal fissures — tears around the anus — which can cause sharp, burning, and stinging pain, as well as bloody stools. Unfortunately, you're more likely to experience hemorrhoids or anal fissures the more you strain to have bowel movements. Holding it in can also damage your internal sphincter, the muscle in your rectum that relaxes to allow for quick and easy bowel movements. The more you ignore the urge to go, the more you train this muscle to stop relaxing entirely, making it more difficult to expel future stools, and increasing your risk for future constipation.

Moving forward in your life and relationship, it might be helpful to consider why you're so uncomfortable letting loose around your boyfriend. Are you worried he'll think it's weird or "unsexy?" Whatever the reason, you might find it helpful to remember that your boyfriend made a decision to live with you because he wanted to be with you. More than likely, he's not concerned with what you're doing in the bathroom and just wants to spend more intimate time with you. So rather than ignoring your natural urges, relish in your shared space (yes, that includes the bathroom)! If you're still feeling self-conscious, the following tips may help you cover your tracks while going number two in your own home:

- **Mask your scent.** If you're worried about a lingering smell, one spritz of air freshener sprayed directly into the toilet bowl often does the trick. But don't overdo it as this may just call attention to the underlying smell. If there's no air freshener in sight, you can light a match, a candle, or even spray some perfume.
- **Use a distant bathroom or one that's your own.** If you have more than one bathroom in the house, you can sneak away to the bathroom further from your partner and do the deed! Alternatively, you can establish two separate bathrooms — one for you and one for him — so that you can hopefully feel more comfortable relieving yourself in your own space.
- **Laugh it off.** You can use humor to break the ice by making a joke of your poop. You could playfully say something such as, "I wouldn't go into the bathroom if I were you!" Once you've broken the bodily function barrier, it shows that you're truly comfortable with the person and your relationship could escalate to a new comfort level.
- **Remember, everyone does it!** Just like breathing, "pooing" is completely natural. When you gotta go, you gotta go. It is not up to anyone to judge you for what you do on the pot.

Hope these tips keep you (and your bowel) moving, no matter what day of the week!

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