

WEIRD BODY SCIENCE



That annoying bump! That strange noise! That embarrassing, um, bathroom issue...no, it's not just you. Here's what's going on when you notice these odd but harmless things — and what you can do about them

by **LESLIE GOLDMAN**

Illustrations by **SÉBASTIEN THIBAUT**

Just as I'm falling asleep, my whole body jerks and jolts me awake.

That's a hypnic jerk, and about 70% of people have experienced these sudden muscle contractions, according to the National Sleep Foundation. As the brain eases into dream, or REM, sleep, it sends a signal down the spine to immobilize voluntary muscles so you won't act out your dreams. Normally that's slow and subtle, but when you're sleep-deprived it's a faster and less smooth transition, explains neurologist and sleep specialist W. Christopher Winter, M.D. So if you have a falling or stumbling dream, in a sense it gets acted out with a jerk.

THE FIX: While they may be alarming, don't fret — hypnic jerks aren't dangerous. But take them as a sign that you need to catch more zzz's.

My joints are *creeeeeaky*!

That’s your body asking you to move more. Creaking, cracking, snapping or grating sounds in the joints (“crepitus” in medical lingo) can result from a tight muscle or tendon causing friction over a bone or a release of trapped gases (mostly air) from the soft tissues around the joints, says Brian Hollett, M.D., an internist at Shift, an integrative health and wellness practice in Chicago. “It tends to worsen with a lack of motion and circulation,” says Karen Bisesi, D.C., a chiropractor based in Carmel, IN. “That’s why you’ll often hear it first thing in the morning, and it tends to dissipate after you walk around a bit.”

THE FIX: Amp up your activity level, suggests Dr. Hollett. “When it comes to joint health, we say, ‘Motion is lotion.’” Stretching, achieving a healthy weight and building and maintaining strength and cardiovascular fitness will all help quiet your skeletal symphony. Got pain, swelling or instability in your joints? See a doctor to check for other joint conditions.

When I remove my polish, my nails are tinted yellow.

The cells in your nails are tightly packed, but they’re porous, and darker lacquer—even higher-end brands—can seep in and cause yellowing, says Dana Stern, M.D., nail expert and assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai Medical Center. Surprisingly, using polish remover may intensify staining, since this dissolves the pigments in the polish, which can then more easily leach into the nail. Longer soaks, like those required for gel polish, may also increase the potential for staining.

THE FIX: Use a soft brush to scrub nails gently with a whitening toothpaste containing hydrogen peroxide, says Dr. Stern. If that doesn’t lift stains, camouflage them with a new mani—including a clear base coat, which can help prevent yellowing.



I sneeze when my eyebrows are waxed.

That’s because both the forehead and the tip of the nose are connected to the trigeminal nerve. “It starts in the brain and has three main parts that spread throughout the face like tree branches, allowing for feeling and movement,” says dermatologist Emily Rubenstein, D.O., director of Swedish Covenant Health’s Swedish Skin Institute in Chicago. Thanks to the shared nerve, “when you aggravate the brows through waxing or tweezing, you can irritate the nose, causing a sneeze.” A similar mechanism causes some people to sneeze when gazing at the sun.

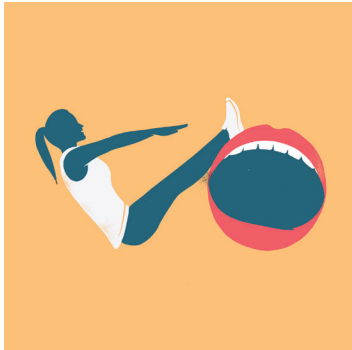
THE FIX: During your appointment, ask the aesthetician to press her finger to the eyebrow immediately after removing a section of hair; the pressure may help distract the nerve, interrupting the sneeze reflex.



Umm...I had an orgasm while doing ab exercises!

A small number of lucky women—up to 10%—have had an exercise-induced orgasm, also called a “core-gasm” because it often happens during abdominal moves, says Debby Herbenick, Ph.D., a professor of human sexuality at the Indiana University Bloomington School of Public Health and author of *The Coregasm Workout*. Experts don’t know exactly why this happens, but since these orgasms usually occur when the core muscles are fatiguing, the pelvic-floor muscles (the same ones used when you do Kegels) may get recruited, leading to a buildup of stimulation.

THE FIX: We’re not sure this is something that needs to be “fixed,” but if you’d like to accelerate your orgasm during sex, exercise can help, says Herbenick. Regular workouts can relieve stress (a well-known mood killer) and boost sexual satisfaction.



What’s that tiny, weird bump on my tongue that kind of hurts?

Some people call these “lie bumps,” thanks to an old wives’ tale claiming them to be the result of fibbing. They’re actually called transient lingual papillitis, a fancy way of saying “inflamed taste buds.” Possible culprits include acidic, spicy, sugary or too-hot foods and stress; trauma to the tongue from accidental biting may also cause them, says Lauren Becker, D.D.S., a general and cosmetic dentist in private practice in New York City.

THE FIX: They go away in a day or two on their own, and while you can’t speed healing, you can get relief from the sting. Becker suggests swishing with salt water and avoiding spicy or acidic foods.

I get diarrhea during my period.

When you’re menstruating, your body produces chemicals called prostaglandins that help the uterus contract and expel its lining. They can affect the large intestine in a similar way, speeding up bowel movements in the process. To make matters worse, progesterone levels are low during your period, “and progesterone tends to slow down the GI tract,” says Dr. Fisher. The result: About 30% of women with otherwise normal bowel habits report diarrhea during their periods, according to one study. (And chronically constipated women may have normal BMs then.)

THE FIX: Try ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or naproxen (Aleve) as soon as your period starts, as either will block prostaglandins. The earlier you take it, the fewer prostaglandins will make their way toward your GI tract.

There are corn kernels in my poop!

The hull, or outer layer, of a corn kernel is made of cellulose, a substance humans can’t digest. “If you swallow a kernel whole, it will travel through your stomach and intestines without getting broken down and come out the other end” around three to six days later, says Deborah Fisher, M.D., a gastroenterologist and associate professor of medicine at Duke University. Even if you chew every kernel, the insides will get digested but the hulls will remain more or less intact. Chances are there are other pieces of undigested plant matter, like beans and seeds, there too, but they stand out less.

THE FIX: None, short of skipping corn—but you shouldn’t, because this is nothing to worry about. Consider it a cool science experiment that shows you how efficiently your system is working.



My legs itch after exercise when I haven’t done it in a while.

You’ve got runner’s itch! “Exercise increases blood flow to the capillaries—small blood vessels—on the skin’s surface,” says Dr. Hollett. “If you’re out of practice, this natural capillary swelling can feel like an itching sensation.” It’s often more pronounced in cool weather due to a triple whammy of dry air, poor hydration and friction between skin and workout gear, but it can occur in any season.

THE FIX: Moisturizing regularly should help, as will choosing workout attire made from synthetic moisture-wicking fabrics, which “move and stretch well while limiting friction,” says Dr. Hollett. Once you settle into a regular exercise routine, the itching should stop.





My legs feel numb when I sit on the toilet too long.

That pins-and-needles sensation can happen when the sciatic nerve running through your glutes is compressed by a hard toilet seat. (It's similar to when you sleep in an awkward position and awaken with a numb arm, but a different nerve is involved.) One modern-day culprit: the smartphone. "People scroll in the bathroom, checking email and social media, and they end up with numb legs from hanging out in that position for too long," Dr. Fisher says. Constipation or excessive straining can also cause numbness. "When you bear down, the pressure can push the discs in your spine into nearby nerves, leading to strange sensations, like pins and

needles or a 'waterfall' down the leg," says Bisesi.

THE FIX: Don't linger. If constipation is the reason you're parked for a while, increase your intake of fiber and water (fresh fruits and vegetables supply both). Still stuck? Ask your doctor about fiber supplements, or try a low stool set in front of the toilet: Research shows that this facilitates pooping because it raises your feet a few inches off the ground, straightening the rectum.