

The Most Common Dreams in the UK

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We all dream, but do we dream about the same things? Do we have much in common with others in our cities or countries? Does the food we consume increase the chance of nightmares? Or are you, like many others, trying to influence what you dream about through lucid dreaming?

Well, the team at The Mobility Furniture Company have conducted a new data study about what the UK has dreamt about most over the past year and what kind of dream-related searches are most prominent per location.

It's a universal curiosity to wonder what your dreams mean and what your subconscious mind is trying to communicate through metaphors and symbolism. Most dreams shouldn't be taken literally, as there is a lot of diversity and subjectivity in dream interpretation and their meanings can differ across sources. Experts agree, however, that some dreams can have specific meanings, particularly if it's a recurring one.

To help remedy and improve sleep quality, we have provided tips on how to sleep better by sleep expert, Dr David R Lee (BSc PhD CertEd CPsychol AFBPsS CSci) at the bottom of this article.

How we did it

Using the SEO tool SEMRush, the team researched keyword variations with the most monthly online searches to determine and categorise the most popular and notable dream related questions across the UK. Then Google Keyword Planner enabled the team to gather monthly online searches per country and city, for populations over 300,000 between January and December 2021.

The data was then indexed and calculated with the latest available ONS Population Statistics per capita 1000. This enabled locations to be ranked in terms of the most common dreams, nightmare searches and dream questions. Dream interpretations in accordance with the top ranking common dreams have been linked throughout this article.

What we found out

The research has enabled us to see which locations dream and search about what the most. Be it the top 20 most common dreams, e.g. teeth falling out, dreams of cheating on a partner or killing someone. Or notable nightmare-related searches. e.g. does cheese cause nightmares or why do I keep getting nightmares? Or notable dream-related questions, e.g. how to lucid dream, how to have or stop having wet dreams.

Teeth falling out was the most common dream search across all UK cities and countries in 2021. This dream often symbolises a loss of control in real life and could be a universal impact of the pandemic. However, dream searches have varied greatly between countries and cities within the UK, as our findings demonstrate. Could where you live influence what you dream about? Or is it just that some dreams pique our curiosity more than others? Perhaps we'll never know the answer to that, but we do know, at least, who's searching for what, and where.

Explore the rankings in our [infographic](#) to find out what your city dreams about.

Most popular dreams by country

England

According to the study results, people in England are most likely to dream about snakes, closely followed by fish and spiders – although this doesn't necessarily represent a fear of slippery things. As snakes appear in many cultural mythologies it's more likely that it represents a toxic or poisonous person in your life, says professional dream analyst and author [Lauri Quinn Loewenberg](#) – although it could also depend on the kind of snake. A boa constrictor might suggest you're feeling squeezed or pressured by someone or something, while a rattlesnake could be a warning. On the other hand, a harmless snake may represent a neutralised or imagined threat, while a snake shedding its skin could signify some kind of transformation.

Scotland

Scotland could claim to be the friendliest country in the UK, as it turns out they're the most likely to dream about dogs. Dogs in dreams symbolise friendship and loyalty, either yours or someone else's, or someone unexpected who's protecting you. Friendly dogs also signify companionship and community, suggesting that the Scots are always looking out for one another. Curiously, Scots also dreamed a lot about cheating on their partners and their ex-partners, so perhaps the dogs appear as reassurance of their faith and fidelity.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland followed the trend of the UK in 2021, as most people dreamt about teeth falling out. Could it be that the loss of control is most keenly felt here, after centuries of being caught in the struggles between England and the rest of Ireland? Generally, dreaming of losing teeth symbolises stress, anxiety, jealousy or a deep personal loss or change – although it could also be caused by something as simple as grinding your teeth in your sleep. Other common dreams in Northern Island were being pregnant – another symbol of change – and spiders.

Wales

In contrast to the rest of the UK, Welsh dreamers are most likely to look up the meaning of ghosts in their dreams, with rats and horses coming in second and third. While some experts believe a ghost appearing in a dream could be a genuine visitation, it's more likely, says Loewenberg, to indicate some unfinished business that is 'haunting' you, or an attempt by your subconscious to seek closure. Another theory is that the abundance of ghost stories and legends that have sprung up along the Welsh coast and passed into folklore in the form of bedtime stories might also be a contributing factor to these spooky night time visions in Wales.

Most common dreams by city

London

Sleepers in the capital are most likely to be dreaming about fish, according to the search results – although it's probably not because they live near a major river. Fish often feature in common sayings and idioms – for example 'there are plenty of fish in the sea' or 'a fish out of water' – and are common in religious symbolism, so the context of the dream will likely be significant. For example, if you're reeling in a fish, is it a good fish or a dangerous one? If you're throwing one back, is there something in your life you need to let go? Or if there's a whole school of fish, that could signify abundance in your life.

Liverpool

On trend with the rest of the UK, Liverpool's most common dream search was teeth falling out – in fact Liverpoolians topped the country for searches on that topic. It also seems that residents in the pop capital are the most vivid dreamers across the board, as they

ranked first in 10 of the 20 most common dreams in the UK. After teeth falling out, Liverpool's next most common dreams were pregnancy and spiders – suggesting they're feeling a combination of loss of control, change and deceit – but perhaps not all is lost, as the next most common dream was about dogs, which suggests they're all banding together and supporting each other through the tough times.

Newcastle & Edinburgh

It may seem that Newcastle is the most duplicitous city in England, and Edinburgh is Scotland's, as the most common dream in both cities was cheating on a partner. Loewenberg is quick to reassure us that it's not necessarily a comment about the state of a relationship. It's more likely, she says, to be about the particular emotion you're feeling in the dream – such as guilt, insecurity, boredom or jealousy – and can have different meanings depending on who's doing the cheating, and with whom. It could be something as simple as wanting to spend more time with your partner, or having too many demands on your time. And while it's probably not a warning to stay away from Newcastle's famous clubbing scene, it is probably telling you there's an unsatisfactory area in your life that you should examine more closely.

Glasgow

In contrast, Glaswegians apparently dream about their ex-partners more than any other city in the UK, along with dreams about drowning and being pregnant. So does this mean that Glasgow is full of exhausted and jilted lovers coming over from Edinburgh with more than they bargained for? Well, no, but it could suggest that Glaswegians are feeling a little overwhelmed, excited and anxious, possibly with some unresolved issues surrounding past relationships. On the other hand, dreaming about an ex-partner is actually very common and could just be a mental habit, as chances are you used to think about that person quite a lot.

Belfast

You might be forgiven for feeling the need to avoid Belfast when you read that the most common dream in the Northern Irish capital is murder – but you needn't cancel your holiday plans just yet. It's much more likely that the dreamers are simply feeling a need to eliminate or get away from something in their life, depending on whether their role is as the culprit or the victim. It's worth noting, also, that crime-related dreams can be a symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), in which case talking to a professional may help to determine and neutralise any underlying negative emotions.

Leeds

Another one not to be taken literally, the most common dream subject in Leeds was death – a powerful metaphorical symbol. It can have several meanings, depending on who's dying in the dream, and how – for example, dreaming about your own death can be a sign of positive changes on the horizon. The death of someone else could mean you're

ready to let something go from your life, either the person themselves or, more likely, something they represent. Either way, despite being emotional and unsettling, dreams about death are quite normal and usually aren't something you need to worry about.

Sheffield

Like their neighbours in Leeds, the dreamers of Sheffield are also most likely to dream about death – although theirs are more specific in that they're usually about drowning. In a way this is much easier to interpret, as drowning is a well-known metaphor for feeling overwhelmed or swamped. It's not a sign that you should avoid bodies of water – but if you find yourself using expressions like 'drowning in paperwork' or 'I can't catch my breath' during the day then it may be time to reexamine your schedule.

Which cities have the most nightmares?

Nightmares are dreams that are upsetting or disturbing, often causing us to feel intense emotions – such as anger, sadness, guilt or fear – which can linger even after we've woken up. They're a normal part of mental and emotional development and are more common when we're young, however at least half of us report having occasional nightmares as adults, too. While this isn't generally a symptom of any underlying problem, they are worth looking into if similar themes keep cropping up or they're starting to affect your quality of sleep. Speaking of looking into nightmares, it seems that some cities in the UK are having more bad dreams than others.

Glasgow

It's unlikely there's something going on in Glasgow that's giving its citizens more than their share of nightmares, but Glaswegians are more likely to try and find out why they have them, as they rank higher than any other city in searching for what causes nightmares. Unfortunately, there's no hard and fast rule about this, but common triggers include anxiety, depression, stress or even watching scary movies before bed. If you're having regular nightmares it could also be physiological, caused by illness, medication, substance abuse or even a sleep disorder, in which case you should talk to your medical professional.

Bristol

Like their northern friends, Bristolians are also curious about why they have nightmares, but are also keen to find out how to stop them. Alas, they would have been disappointed, as there's no fool-proof way of preventing bad dreams – but eliminating some of the factors that cause them can significantly reduce their likelihood. Things like changing your bedtime routine, reducing your caffeine intake and using relaxation techniques can help, as can exercising more during the day. If those don't work and your nightmares keep occurring, you could try an over-the-counter sleep aid, or consider talking to a psychotherapist. Think too about changing your mattress or buying a new bed etc.

Liverpool

Perhaps it's because they're surrounded by land that produces that famous milk-based delicacy that goes so well with their own Jacob's Crackers that Liverpoolians are most likely to search for whether or not nightmares are caused by eating cheese. Could they be hoping that cheese is the culprit, and therefore they've found an easy fix? Or are they hoping to exonerate cheese and continue enjoying their favourite midnight snack with a clear conscience? Well, we know that any heavy food, cheese or otherwise, can interrupt your sleep if you eat just before bed, but there's no clear evidence that any food in particular will diminish the enjoyment factor of your dreams. Although if you're vulnerable to any kind of indigestion from dairy products, then the cheese probably isn't going to help, either.

Can you influence your own dreams?

It's a question humans have always asked, and perhaps something we've all tried – we go to bed concentrating on something or someone, and hope we'll have a lovely dream about it. Unfortunately, the reality is that it's almost impossible to control what we dream about. However, it is possible to induce lucid dreaming, which is when you're aware that you're dreaming and can recognise your thoughts and emotions as they happen.

About 55% of people have experienced one or more lucid dreams in their lifetime, and while it's generally considered safe, it can be risky for people with mental health disorders. Inducing lucid dreams is a trial and error process, but for those who can control them it has been found to reduce nightmares and enhance creativity. Successful techniques for bringing on a lucid dream include keeping a dream journal, ensuring you get enough REM sleep, or practising reality checks and induction methods.

While a lot of mystery still surrounds lucid dreaming, it's clear that humans are very curious about it – particularly in Manchester, which ranked first in the UK in searching for how to have lucid dreams. Newcastle also showed an interest in dream retention, being the most likely to research how to remember dreams. Curiously, they also ranked top in searching for how to stop having wet dreams – could that possibly be linked to all those dreams they're having about infidelity? On the other hand, people in Birmingham searched the most for how to have wet dreams, which although they're more likely to occur in adolescence are still fairly common in adults. Unfortunately for the people of Birmingham, like lucid dreams they are tricky to control, but some studies have found that sexual stimulation before bed, going long periods without sex and even sleeping on your stomach can sometimes bring on erotic dreaming.

Improving sleep quality

Anyone who's ever had a bad night's sleep knows the value of having a good, long, uninterrupted slumber – but as well as making us feel better during the day, getting a regular good night's sleep is essential to our health overall. It helps us maintain a healthy body weight, supports our mental health and gives our immune system a boost. To add to

that, not getting enough sleep increases our risk of heart disease, diabetes and other conditions, as well as making us more prone to accidents and mistakes. Yet despite this, it's estimated that up to 71% of us don't get the recommended 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night, and around 14% average less than five hours, which is dangerously low. So how can we get more value from our sleep time, especially as we get older and our quality of sleep naturally deteriorates?

Six Ways To Sleep Better

All the above indicates the UK needs some guidance on how to have a better night's sleep. So here are some expert recommended tips by Dr David R Lee, BSc PhD CertEd CPsychol AFBPsS CSci., Clinical Director and Founder of [Sleep Unlimited Ltd.](#)

Whether you have vivid dreams, struggle with insomnia or nightmares, having a comfy bed is just one of the six tips that our sleep expert Dr David R Lee has recommended for setting up a good routine and improving sleep quality as we get older.

1. Establish a good routine

Having a regular and calming evening routine helps the body relax and can trigger the mind to start preparing for sleep, as it recognises the activities that precede bedtime. Try to slow down as you complete your hygiene routine, so necessary activities like brushing your teeth, washing your face and even putting on hand cream become mindfulness exercises, which help slow down your breathing and heart rate. Spending a few minutes setting up for the next day, e.g. preparing lunch, setting out your clothes or writing a to-do list can help you feel more in control. Repetitive activities such as knitting or folding clothes can also help calm your thoughts and make it easier to get to sleep. Finally, try going to bed and getting up at the same time each day, as this helps regulate your body's rhythms so it knows when to wake up or become tired. Even on weekends or when you're on holiday, it's best not to change your usual pattern by more than an hour either way.

2. Regular outdoor exercise

Regular physical exercise is good for overall health and promotes tiredness, which makes it easier to fall asleep and achieve deep sleep. It can also alleviate symptoms such as cramp, restless legs or muscle stiffness, which can keep us awake. The best time to exercise is in the morning or afternoon, as the rise in blood pressure and body temperature caused by physical exertion keeps the body and mind awake and alert. Ideally, you need at least a couple of hours for them to return to normal. Exercise outdoors if possible, as the bright natural daylight triggers the production of melatonin in our bodies, the hormone responsible for regulating our sleep patterns. Melatonin is best made under the conditions of blue-end spectrum light, which is what we see in the morning and early afternoon. In the evenings the light shifts to the red end of the spectrum, signalling to our brain that it will soon be time for sleep. Exposure to the bright light earlier in the day keeps our body producing melatonin at the right times, in turn keeps our sleep patterns regular.

3. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Insomnia

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBTi) is a talking therapy that examines and then helps reframe thoughts, feelings or behaviours which may be contributing to a problem, in this case, a sleep disorder. Essentially, CBTi firstly aims to identify all the things that sleep likes, such as a consistent routine, good levels of activity during the day and plenty of exposure to natural daylight, and do more of these. Secondly, it aims to identify and remove all the things that get in the way of sleep, allowing our body and our brain to calm down in the evenings to help promote sleep initiation and deep sleep. CBTi is the number one treatment recommended for insomnia by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and is effective in around 70% of cases. Along with sleeping tablets, it is the only intervention currently approved by the NHS.

4. A comfortable bed

There's nothing more likely to keep us awake at night than being uncomfortable. A supportive mattress and adjustable bed can help you avoid aches, back pain and bad posture. Consider memory foam, gel or latex, as they mould to the shape of your body and provide extra support for joints. They also have low motion transfer, so are great if you share the bed with a partner. Choose an appropriate fabric for your sheets, e.g. linen is great in the summer as it wicks moisture and is bacteria resistant, while wool is a good choice for winter to keep you warm. Make sure you also choose the right firmness for your mattress, e.g. side sleepers might consider a soft-medium or medium-firm mattress, while back and stomach sleepers are better off with medium-firm or firm. It's also worth investing in a good quality and supportive pillow, which should be replaced when worn out.

5. Gentle relaxation activities

Just as physical exertion can prevent you from falling asleep, mild exercise helps promote it. Gentle movements like stretching, yoga or even a leisurely walk help slow our breathing and heart rate, and can relieve muscle tension which may keep us tossing and turning at night. These activities can also encourage mindfulness, taking our thoughts away from the stresses of the day and onto our body and our breath. Not only does this help us relax physically, but it can improve our mood and feel calm, which makes it easier to fall asleep. Other activities that can help with sleep include a gentle massage, a cool bath, meditation and calming music.

6. Avoid stressful content & conversations before bed

Studies have shown that stressful situations can trigger physical changes in the body like those produced by vigorous exercise, making us more alert and therefore less able to fall asleep. Scary movies, arguments and even watching the news can all initiate this stress response, and are therefore best avoided in the evening. It can also help to stop looking at your phone in the two hour window before bedtime, as it emits light at the blue end of the spectrum which inhibits sleep. Alternatively, using a yellow-toned light or doing

activities which make you feel good, such as cuddling a pet, reading a book or meditation can help you fall asleep easier. Also it would be best to avoid caffeine in the evening, as it has a long half-life of around four to six hours, which is how long it takes for our bodies to eliminate half of it. Instead, go for a decaf in the afternoon and perhaps herbal tea in the evening.

The bottom line

All of us have dreams, and most of us still have nightmares from time to time. And just as there are themes, emotions and scenarios that are common to many of our night time visions, so too is our curiosity to understand them, and sometimes even to control them.

While there isn't yet any guaranteed way to influence our dreams, the good news is that most of them shouldn't be taken literally – so there's no need to worry if you dream about dying, cheating on a partner or killing someone. On the other hand, if the same subjects or people keep cropping up, it might be worth further investigation, especially if they're related to some unresolved or anxiety-inducing issues in your daily life. And who knows, once you've done a little digging and cleared the air, you might even get a better night's sleep without any effort at all.

It's worth investing in a comfortable bed as well as a supportive mattress and pillow, as there's nothing more likely to keep us awake at night than being uncomfortable.

Sources

Methodology Tools

Articles

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About Dr Rob Hicks?

One of the UK's most popular and well-known media-doctors, Dr Rob Hicks is an experienced GP who lives with his family in Greater London. He is the resident doctor on "The Chrissy B Show", medical adviser to the TV drama "Doctors", and is regularly heard on the radio. A prolific health writer and medical journalist, Dr Rob Hicks has written three books and regularly contributes to magazines and national newspapers.

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