

Nocturnal penile tumescence recorded in primates for the first time

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Infra-red cameras caught images of nocturnal chimpanzee behavior. Credit:

Kyoto University

KyotoU researchers have discovered a physical phenomenon that previously was only observed in human males.

We now learn that chimpanzees are among the league of early risers. Researchers recording and analyzing the sleep patterns of captive male chimpanzees using [infrared cameras](#) noticed that some males were frequently experiencing nocturnal erections.

"Until now, spontaneous nocturnal penile tumescence, or NPT, had not been recorded in any primates. We had only assumed its occurrence," says lead author Kristin Haverkamp.

When the scientists began their analysis, they realized that they had caught this physiological phenomenon on tape, sometimes followed by masturbation and the ingestion of ejaculate.

"Masturbation by primates has already been described in numerous reports because it is observable during the daytime," Haverkamp adds.

The team, including primate sexuality experts at University College London, found that eight out of a dozen observed male chimpanzees demonstrated NPT. Additionally, of these eight, half were recorded masturbating and consuming the resulting ejaculate. This latter behavior has also been observed in other [primates](#), which scientists speculate supplement the regular diet with essential minerals and other nutrients.

The researchers also recorded—perhaps for the first time—one possible case of spontaneous ejaculation in the form of a "wet dream."

As to the cause of NPT, the authors posit that this physiological function may maintain [sexual health](#), either optimizing ejaculate quality or increasing oxygenation in genital tissue, thus preventing [erectile dysfunction](#).

"Uncovering nocturnal erections and masturbation in [chimpanzees](#) may help us better understand similar behavior in male humans," concludes Havercamp.

The research was published in *Behaviour*.

More information: Kristin Havercamp et al, Spontaneous nocturnal erections and masturbation in captive male chimpanzees (Pan troglodytes), *Behaviour* (2022). [DOI: 10.1163/1568539X-bja10166](https://doi.org/10.1163/1568539X-bja10166)

Provided by Kyoto University

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