

Beds and Pillows



For something as fundamentally important as a bed where we spend one third of our lives, we give it very little thought.

At some time or another, a back sufferer may turn their attention to whether their bed may be contributing to their problem. Most mattresses have a life span of less than 10 years, some cheap mattresses considerably less. Yet the average couple hang on to their haven of slumber for more than 17 years.

Only 11% of people replace a bed because it has become uncomfortable. So how do you tell if you need to replace your mattress? If the mattress sags in the middle or it is just plain lumpy it has to go. If you find you and your partner roll together then that too is a sign the bed has had enough. You may be one of the 16% who finds their partner won't stop cuddling them.

Your bed, unamourously, could be the reason.

Once you have bought a new bed or mattress you can rest assured that, according to a French study, you are likely to drop off more quickly, wake up less in the night and overall gain up to an hours sleep per night – good news for chronic back pain sufferers. This is backed up by the attitudes of British GPs. More than nine out of ten agree that anew bed can help a bad back. Chiropractors also support this view and are often called upon to advise about the best sort of bed. Indeed, Chiropractors help many manufacturers in the design of their beds.

We toss and turn up to 70 times a night; we lose about half a pint of perspiration, most into our mattress and we grow up to two centimetres overnight. Our mattresses have a lot to cope with and the real surprise is that they last ten years in the first place!

The Sleep Council has devised a simple bed MOT which they recommend should be done every year after the first 3 –5 years. 3 'yes' answers mean you're not getting the best possible night's sleep. 5 or more 'yes' answers and it's time to buy a new bed!

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| * Is the bed 10 years or more old? | Y | N |
| * Do you ever wake up with neck or back ache? | Y | N |
| * Is the mattress cover torn or stained? | Y | N |
| * When lying in bed, do you feel springs or ridges under you? | Y | N |
| * When moving in bed do you hear creaks, crunches or suspicious noises? | Y | N |
| * Do you and your partner roll towards each other unintentionally? | Y | N |
| * Is the bed too small to give an undisturbed night's sleep? | Y | N |
| * Is the divan or base uneven or sagging? | Y | N |
| * Are the legs and castors worn out? | Y | N |

ANSWERS; Yes No

We care about you

What to look for in a Good Bed

The commonest mistake is to think that hard is good and the harder the better! Your spine is curved and lying on a flat surface which will not mould to your shape is not going to give you support. 'Orthopaedic' beds are little more than hard beds with a large price tag! Find a bed that is soft enough to fill in the gap under your lower back and gives under your hips and shoulders when lying on your side. If it is too soft you will find it sagging under your weight.

If you are buying a bed with a partner, try the bed out for at least several minutes. The best way to test a bed is to sleep on it and many manufacturers give a guarantee to swap it for another. The most basic mattress is a **continuous coil spring** design. This cheaper model is fine for a guest room or infrequent use. Regular use will wear it out more quickly than a **pocket sprung** design. These are more comfortable and are ideal when two partners are of different weights. Comfort and price are determined by the number of pocket springs and the padding.

More recently **foam** mattresses have become popular with advances in foam technology. The best mattresses, which can cost as much as a whole new bed, are made of heat sensitive foam which are cool and yet mould perfectly to your shape. Cheap foams tend to break down quickly and are not a good investment. Foams are better for asthma and hayfever sufferers but possibly not for people who are sensitive to chemicals.

Chiropractors are often asked about **futons** which are popular, especially where space is at a premium as they can be folded up. Futons are made in layers – the more layers, the more comfortable and expensive they become. A minimum for regular use is seven layers as they tend to compress with time and become very hard. An inexpensive coil bed offers better value, comfort and durability.

A solid **slatted base** is the firmest and the least expensive. It also has good support for sitting and getting on and off. A firm edge with **springs** in the centre of a solid frame also offers good support. Alternatively, a full, sprung edge base, being more flexible, will absorb wear and tear well. **Never put a new mattress on an old base** – it will quickly take on the faults of the old base!

Pillow Talk

The other essential ingredient for successful sleep is the **pillow**. Again regular replacement is necessary. One study found up to half a kilo (1lb) of skin, hair and the microscopic organisms that live on them, in old pillows!

The sole aim of your pillow should be to **support** your neck in the ideal position. If you stand with your back to a wall you will notice that your head doesn't touch it. This is the gap that needs to be filled by the pillow. Fortunately this happens to be about the same gap as that between your neck and the bed when lying on your side. If your pillow is too big your head is tilted up putting a strain on your delicate neck joints. Not enough support and your neck sags into the gap with the same result.

One pillow is better than two as it moves around less and will stay in the proper position pulled down to your shoulder. Having no pillow is not good for you and if you are more comfortable sleeping this way than you may have a neck problem. Some people prefer to sleep on the front which is worst of all because the neck is twisted round unnaturally. A good pillow can make this impossible and help break the habit. The only real choice is between a good quality feather/down and foam. People with neck problems need a shaped foam pillow which is thicker at the neck section and provides the best support. Buy one from a reputable supplier as the cheap ones don't last.

Please give this to a friend or colleague if you think Chiropractic may help them.

Have them call us on

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