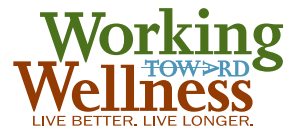


Choosing a Mattress

A Personal Choice



HOT TOPIC

Not sure what to look for in a new mattress?

With so many options available, ranging from waterbeds to mattresses made from space age foam, it's hard to know what to look for. As most people spend more than one-third of their life in bed, it's important to make sure you are sleeping on a mattress that's right for you.

There is no magic formula for finding the right mattress; no one mattress is best for everyone. It's a very personal choice. The key is to know your sleeping style and spend the time to find the mattress that is most suitable and comfortable for you.



When is it Time for a New Mattress?

Typically, manufacturers recommend that a mattress be replaced every 10 to 13 years. This can vary depending on the brand as well as wear and tear. If your sleep is interrupted due to discomfort, it may be time to buy a new mattress even if you haven't had it for that long. Other signs include permanent dips in the mattress and waking up stiff or with a backache.

Types of Mattresses

The most common type of mattress is the innerspring mattress with coils in a variety of configurations. Alternatives include air-filled mattresses with adjustable firmness on both sides, and the Tempur-Pedic™ (memory foam) mattresses. Consumer tests have found that more expensive alternative mattresses do not necessarily guarantee a better sleep.

Main Mattress Components

Top Padding

Padding is typically made of polyurethane foam and, in some cases, may have added polyester batting. The batting makes the mattress softer and more breathable, but does not affect the support. A 'pillow top' mattress has a separate thick layer of padding attached to the top and bottom. These mattresses tend to compress more readily than the more thinly padded alternatives and as a result, lose their ability to bounce back over time. If you want extra padding, it is recommended to buy a padded overlay to place on top of the mattress, which can be fluffed up and eventually replaced.

Ticking

Ticking is the outer most layer of the mattress. If you like a cushiony feeling, look for a larger quilt pattern. Typically, the smaller the pattern, the firmer the mattress feels.

Coils

Coils provide the main support in spring mattresses. When choosing what gauge of coil to purchase, remember that the heavier gauge coils (12.5) are less flexible, and therefore, less springy. With lighter gauge coils (14 to 15.5), the total coil count should be higher (500 to 800) to compensate for their easier give under pressure.

Size

It is important not to go too small when choosing a mattress. Make sure you will have enough room to shift positions freely throughout the night. Here are some things to think about when deciding on a size that's right for you:

Full or Double (53" x 75")

This size may fit one adult, but could be too close for comfort for some couples.

Queen (60" x 80")

Although this is the most common mattress size for couples, it may not provide enough personal space to allow for an uninterrupted sleep.

King (76" x 80")

This is the best size for couples wanting to have their personal space; it is double the width of a twin-sized bed.

Is a Firm Mattress Really the Best Choice?

There is very little evidence to suggest that the firmer the mattress, the better it is for your back. The best sleep occurs when a mattress effectively supports your spine and is comfortable for you. Testing the mattress in the store will help you make the best choice. Some sleep experts even recommend a 15-minute in-store test. Spend at least 5 minutes in your preferred sleeping position on each mattress that you are considering.

Better still, take advantage of the sleep trials that many stores are now offering. When you get a new mattress, it may take a period of two to four weeks for you to adjust to the new level of comfort and support. Some stores may allow you to test out the mattress for up to a month. Be aware of any hidden return or disposal fees that may not be clearly stated.

Pillow

Your pillow should provide your head and neck with the right support for proper positioning. Your head should be in the same position in relation to your shoulders as if you were standing with correct upright posture. If you sleep on your side, a fairly firm pillow may help to provide extra support. A small pillow under the waist while lying on the side may provide additional support. If you sleep on your back, a medium-firm pillow may help to lower the height of the pillow. Finally, if you sleep on your stomach, it is advised to choose a soft pillow to lessen the strain on the neck.

If you feel that you've taken the appropriate steps to choose a mattress that is comfortable for you, but are still having an uncomfortable or disrupted sleep, it may be a good idea to discuss the situation with your physician.

Buyer Beware

Beds or mattresses with names including 'paedic', 'chiro', and 'ortho' aren't necessarily better for your spine than others.

A therapeutic bed should only be prescribed or recommended by a physician or health professional (e.g., Chiropractor, Occupational Therapist, Physiotherapist).



What about the new memory foam?

This foam was originally intended to protect astronauts from the force of gravity. Advantages of memory foam are that it conforms to your body, can help to prevent you from feeling motion from the other side of the bed, and that it eventually returns to its original form once weight is removed.

References:

The Better Sleep Council. (2003). *Mattress shopping*. Retrieved on October 17, 2005 from <http://www.bettersleep.org/OnBetterSleep/>

ConsumerReports.org. (2005). *Mattress sets*. Retrieved on October 17, 2005 from <http://www.consumerreports.org/> (From main page type in "mattress sets" in search box).