



Riverview Clinic

Osteopathic Information Service

Choosing a bed

Is your bed helping, or is it part of your back problem?

Top tips for back pain sufferers:

1. The majority of mattresses need to be turned regularly (between six weeks and three months). Do get someone to help you avoid the strain of turning your mattress. If you live on your own you may prefer one of the foam/latex mattresses that don't need turning.
2. The mattress should be supportive enough to take the weight of the body without sagging. If you are used to a soft bed, don't suddenly change to a very hard bed; the difference may prove difficult to adapt to. However, the mattress does need to be firm enough to allow for shifts of posture during the night. This is necessary to lessen fatigue and relieve the prolonged stress on soft tissues – it is not easy turning on a really 'giving' surface!
3. The mattress needs to be comfortable to lie on and soft enough, with sufficient 'give', to support and cushion the body's bony curves (for example like that provided by a 'pocket sprung' mattress). Don't be embarrassed to lie on the bed for twenty minutes or so in the shop – it's not as long as you'll spend on it each night!
4. In one GP study 85% of doctors believed that allergic disorders, such as asthma and eczema could be aggravated by sleeping on beds which harboured dust and mites. Hygiene and ventilation of the bed and covers are important; special protective covers may also help.
5. The mattress needs to allow for the easy evaporation of perspiration. The body loses between one and two pints of perspiration per night. The divan or slatted base allows for air circulation. If you are going to put a board under your mattress to improve support ensure it has holes for ventilation. The residue of perspiration will otherwise result in early rotting of the repeatedly 'damp' mattress fillings.

6. A good heavy mattress will need a strong base. It is best to buy the base and mattress together, but if you buy these items separately do seek advice from the sales representative that they would make a suitable combination and get this in writing as otherwise the guarantee on either the base or mattress may be invalidated by misuse. Remember you won't get an idea of how the bed will ultimately feel unless you are trying base and mattress together.

7. The bed itself should, of course, be soundly constructed and represent good value for money. Cost considerations are understandable but the lowest priced bed will not last as long.

8. The base may need to be dismantled if you are likely to move house often – some are much more easily dismantled than others.

9. A 'standard double' bed is 4 feet 6 inches wide but a 'standard single' bed is 3 feet! It is therefore evident that a large double makes more sense for two to sleep in – especially if one individual moves a lot in bed. A larger bed may also be longer too.

10. If you and your partner are of different weights consider a zip and link bed. Choose what's right for you – if you are of average weight and need a supportive mattress but your partner is heavier and requires a firmer one, it might be better to choose a bed with separate mattress types on either side.

11. Another option is a water bed. These are very much a matter of taste. Manufacturers claim that they support the body without distorting the spine and will last for many years without sagging. These beds apparently have no pressure point areas (so they are comfortable), they generally have the facility for internal heating and there is less likelihood of mites and dust. However, as with many things, waterbeds are popular with some people, but others find them very difficult to relax in – try one before you pay in full.

Remember, there is no absolute best choice of bed. Be satisfied it is right for you before you buy because it may be difficult to change it afterwards for purely comfort reasons. Also remember that the word 'orthopaedic' is really meaningless, though it generally implies 'firm'.

If you require further advice on a back problem seek advice from a local osteopath.

