

Things to consider when buying a new mattress

There are many factors to consider when thinking about buying a mattress and at the end of the day, the finer details will always boil down to personal preference. However, there are a few basic guidelines that should be considered when buying a new mattress that will allow those with any doubt about which to choose, to make an informed decision.

Foundations for good sleep

Most bed bases (frames/divans) are fixed, or are platform based. (i.e. they simply provide a hard, raised sleeping surface) However, some divans have sprung bases. That is, springs in the base itself. The only thing to consider with these types of bases is that what ever mattress you place on top, it's overall support will feel slightly softer.

Most mattresses can be placed on most other bed base types but you should be aware that with a wooden slatted bed base, the slats should be no more that 2 - 3 inches apart. If they are, simply add more using the same thickness of wood as the existing slats. Also, ensure that you have good slat support at the head and foot of the bed to avoid top/tail mattress sagging.

Comfort level

Soft, Soft/Medium, Medium, Medium Firm, Firm, Extra Firm... but which one? Well, although personal preference will play a part in your choice, thankfully there is good guidance found in your own body weight. Generally, the heavier you are, the more firmer a mattress you will require to support you. The lighter you are, the firmer a mattress will feel. It's that simple.

Weight of one person

- Up to 76kg (12 stone) - Soft, Medium/Soft, Medium
- Between 76kg and 101kg (12 - 16 stone) - Medium
- 101kg and above (16 stone plus) - Medium, Medium/Firm, Firm

You get what you pay for

As a nation, we generally spend more money on cars and other expensive personal possession items (tv's, computers etc) that we use far less in one 24 hour period than we do our own beds - yet again, as a nation, we're reluctant to spend money on mattresses. A mattress should be seen more as an investment, than a 'compulsory' purchase. You're going to be spending a massive amount of time on it - average 1/3 of your day. It's primary function is to ensure you get 'good quality, valuable rest'. Without good quality sleep, quality of life diminishes also. You can't put a price on quality rest!

That's not to say that what your buying is rubbish if it is cheap. It will still be a good quality 'cheap mattress'. With that in mind though, a cheaper mattress will not provide the support, comfort, luxury and lifespan that a more expensive, good quality mattress will provide.

To Turn or Not To Turn

Another thing to consider is where you want (or indeed are able to) turn your mattress. Avoid a 'turn' mattress if you simply are not physically able to turn it. Whether a mattress is a turn free or not does not reflect it's quality in anyway. It's more to do with how the mattress is made and how it's fillings will react over time to the pressures of use that it will be subject to.

One big plus for a 'turn' mattress is that you will effectively double the life of the mattress surfaces. Of course, the downside is that you actually have to remember to turn it and it can be quite an effort to do so.

Watch out for single sided mattresses - with fillings and padding on one side only - these generally will have a shorter life span, more common with the budget products.

Size matters

If this is part of a new bedroom suite, firstly, whatever size you are thinking about, will it actually fit in the room you're intending to place it in. Often, people plump for the larger sizes before considering just how much room they will have left so a little forethought is advised.

Having said that - don't go too small either! Using too small a mattress will result in a reduced 'sleeping' space for you and your partner - increasing your chances of disturbing one another during sleep.

Consider your bodies frame size and "foot print" (the area you would cover lying down), and that of your partners when making your choice. Don't just buy a double because it's for 'two people'. If the pair of you are largely built, a double is going to be too small.

Mattress type

There are currently three major types of mattress.

- Open coil (coil sprung)
- Pocket Sprung
- Foam

Open coil

As a general rule, the open coil mattress is regarded as the 'classic' mattress design. This 'technology' is now rather dated and far superior mattress construction techniques leave the open coil in the 'budget' range. Sometimes, open coil mattresses are enhanced with 'memory foam' tops etc but generally, they are for the budget concious.

Pros

- Very affordable

Cons

- Sometimes 'noisy' (coil can be heard 'twanging' inside)
- Prone to 'roll off' and 'roll together'
- Provide only a broad, uncountoured level of support
- Shorter life span

Pocket Sprung

Pocket Sprung mattresses are now the 'defacto' standard for what is considered a 'good quality' mattress. A pocket sprung mattress is filled with many 'isolated and separate' springs - these springs move independantly from one another so provide a more 'countoured' level of support. Also, because the springs are in no way connected to each other, 'roll off' and 'roll together' is effectively elliminated. Alot of pocket sprung mattresses are also hand made and include luxurious fillings such as lambswool and cashmere.

Pros

- Excellent value - mid range mattress
- Good product life span
- Greatly reduces 'roll off' and 'roll together'
- Generally a higher quality mattress
- Luxurious feel

Cons

- More expensive

Foam

Foam mattresses are a bit of mixed breed. Some foam mattresses are very cheap simply because they are just a slab of normal foam in a duvet cover. However, when 'memory foam' is used (either solely or in combination with a regular foam (support foam)), the products tend to be more expensive.

A foam/memory foam mattress is not for all tastes. The concept behind it is that the NASA developed Visco Elastic 'memory foam' (usually found covering the mattress to various depths) provides support 'completely' contoured to your body's shape and thus provides maximum support. You end up with a 'floating' sensation.

'Memory foam' comes in density grades - the higher the density, the greater the resistance the foam will have, firmer the mattress will be. Some 'foam' mattresses are a normal supporting foam (non-visco) core with 'memory foam' top layer - these are the more budget types while others are pure visco foam - and thus more expensive.

Pros

- Excellent value - mid range mattress
- Good product life span
- Greatly reduces 'roll off' and 'roll together'
- Maximum contoured support of any mattress type
- An amazing 'floating' sensation

Cons

- Generally more expensive
- Not to all tastes

n.b. some manufacturers will mix techniques offering both pocket sprung or open coil *and* memory foam in one mattress.