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Dr. Shane Explains....

How to Shop for a Mattress

People spend more time on their mattresses than in their cars, yet many people agonize more over their car purchase than their mattresses. A good mattress will help you sleep better. Not getting enough sleep can lower your immune system function, blunt your problem-solving and verbal skills, reaction time, and stamina. A growing body of research suggests that a lack of sleep contributes to weight gain (most likely by altering the body's levels of sugar and appetite regulating hormones) . Even a half-hour of lost sleep is enough to cause these symptoms. Use the following information to help you make an informed decision on how to buy a mattress.

Do You Need a New Mattress

Think about buying a new mattress if:

- You wake up tired.
- You wake up stiff or sore.
- You tend to sleep better at hotels than at home.
- Your mattress looks saggy or lumpy.
- You're over age 40 and your mattress is five to seven years old.
- You're under age 40 and your mattress is ten years old.

How to Test a Mattress

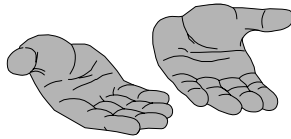
Years ago, most experts recommended that you get a firm mattress. That has changed. A study published in 2003 in the medical journal *The Lancet* suggested that individuals who suffer from lower back pain would benefit from a medium-firm sleeping surface. Also, by age 40, the skin loses elasticity and becomes more sensitive to pressure points. People over 40 typically need softer mattresses. The bottom line is that the optimal surface is purely subjective.

The best way to shop for a mattress is to do a **15-Minute Mattress Test**. Lie on the mattress and spend at least five minutes on each side and your back (or your stomach if that's your preferred position). Try this with several mattresses to feel which is best for you. A study showed that most people who bought a mattress after doing the 15-Minute Test didn't change their opinion of a mattress after taking it home. Don't be embarrassed to lie down on lots of mattresses in the store, salespeople expect it. Wear loose clothes, and shoes that you can slip off.

Here are a couple more tips

Understand the name game. Manufacturers usually modify innerspring mattress they make for different sellers, changing the color, padding, quilting pattern, and so forth. They also change year to year. If you bought a certain mattress 5 years ago, don't expect that it is made of the same material now. Manufacturers don't publish a directory of comparables. Retailers that claim to sell them generally just compile a list of beds that appear equivalent. Don't trust them. Try the manufacturer's web site to find the different mattress lines and all beds in each line that share attributes.

Choose the right firmness. Don't rely on names: Levels are described differently. One company's ultraplush might be another's supersoft. Try each mattress to assess the firmness yourself.



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Different Types of Mattresses

The three different types of mattresses are innerspring mattresses (the kind we've used for years), air-filled mattresses (Select Comfort) and polyurethane "memory foam" (Tempur-Pedic).

A poll indicated that only half of those who owned conventional innerspring mattresses polled were very or completely satisfied with them. One-third of innerspring owners found their beds less comfortable after they slept on them regularly. By contrast, more than two-thirds of the Select Comfort owners and more than three-fourths of the Tempur-Pedic owners were very or completely satisfied with their purchase.

- **Innerspring Mattresses**

A conventional innerspring mattress is the most common choice and often the least expensive. For a queen-sized bed, a coil count of 450 retained its shape about as well as beds with a coil count of 700. Look for a minimum coil count of 390 in a queen-sized bed for an average sized person. If you are bigger, you need a higher coil count.

- **Air-Filled Mattresses (Select Comfort Sleep Number Bed)**

The mattress is a two-chamber inflatable mattress, plus a rigid platform that lets users adjust firmness via a remote-controlled air pump. The benefit of this bed is that if the partners have different preferences for firmness, both can select their preferred level.

- **Polyurethane "Memory Foam" Mattresses (Tempur-Pedic Sleep System)**

An eight to twelve-inch thick memory foam paired with a box spring. The mattress conforms to your body to relieve pressure points as you sleep. Some noted that the mattress had a strong odor. The company called the odor "a normal condition of the product" and said that it dissipates over time. Some user find that the bed makes them feel hot.

Other Considerations

Assess Your Need for a New Box Spring.

Foundations can sell for as much as the mattress they're sold with, even though they're generally just a wood frame enclosing stiff wire and covered with fabric matching the mattresses. Consumer Reports found that companies frequently pair the same foundation with mattresses in different price ranges. You might save by buying a higher-priced mattress with a lower-priced foundation. Once the bed is made, no one will know. If your current foundation is only a few years old, with no rips, warps, creaks, or "give," consider using it with a new mattress. If the old box has bouncy springs instead of stiff wire, it needs to be replaced. Just be careful that this won't void any warranty that comes with your mattress.

Look For a Comfort Guarantee.

Some businesses give you two weeks to several months to return or exchange a bed you don't like. Everyone plays by different rules, and the return usually costs you. Make sure you investigate this before buying a mattress.

Try a Mattress Pad

Mattress pads made of "memory foam" are available. You may find that an innerspring mattress paired with a memory foam mattress pad is comfortable and will save you money.

Warranties and Sagging Mattresses

Manufacturers say a mattress can compress by as much as 1½ inches before it's considered defective. That means the mattress needs to have a difference of 1½ inches from the high to low areas with no one on it before it will be replaced under warranty. The most common reason for sagging is the cushion of the mattress, not the springs. Thicker cushions tend to sag more.