

Buy a New Mattress

By Jeanne Charles

If you've been waking up with back pain, stiffness, or soreness and you find that you haven't been sleeping as well as you used to, you may need a new mattress. Even if your mattress shows no visible signs of wear and tear, if it is more than 10 years old, it's probably time to replace it.

In most communities you will find several places to shop for mattresses including furniture stores, sleep specialty shops and department stores. Check your local papers for advertised specials (there may be an ad in THIS issue) and get a feel for typical prices before you shop. Be prepared to explain whether you prefer a softer or firmer sleeping surface to help narrow down the choices. Many retailers have cutaway mattress demos, which show interior construction features of both the mattress and the box spring.

Visit one or two stores on one day and a couple of other stores another day before you make a decision. You will find that some stores offer free delivery and setup plus disposal of your old mattress. Others may offer a free bed frame or sheet set with your purchase. Some stores may even offer you a chance to exchange your purchase for another model within a specified period of time.

Test several models from famous name brand manufacturers to get a feel for different firmness levels and styles. Wear comfortable shoes that you can easily slip off and on. It is important that you lie down in your normal sleep position and stay long enough to evaluate whether the mattress suits your needs. If your partner prefers firm, and you prefer soft, you may have to compromise somewhere in the middle or consider buying an airbed with adjustable settings on each side. Pillow top mattresses are a popular choice with many consumers today because they offer firm construction underneath with a softer feel next to the body.

Always buy the best mattress you can afford. When you consider that you will spend more time lying on your mattress than you will using other products such as your car, TV, computer, or cell phone, it becomes clear that money you spend on a good mattress is an important investment in your health.

A good mattress and foundation should gently support your body at all points and keep your spine in the same position it would be when standing with good posture. Pay close attention to how the mattress supports your shoulders, hips and lower back. Too little support can cause back pain and a mattress that is too firm may cause you to toss and turn too much.

Make sure you give yourself enough room to move around comfortably. If you sleep with a partner it's smart to buy a queen or king size bed. Both are wider and longer than a full size (double) bed, which only offers each sleeper as much space as a baby's crib. Queen size beds are approximately 60 inches wide by 80 inches long and they are six inches wider and five inches longer than a full size mattress. The added inches can make a big

difference for large adults or couples. Queen size beds are also a good choice for single sleepers who tend to sprawl.

King size beds are 76 inches wide by 80 inches long, making them about 18 inches wider than a queen size. The California King (72 inches x 84 inches) is a smart choice for tall adults who are seeking extra length. A king size bed is great for couples who want maximum sleeping space. It's also large enough to accommodate kids and pets that like to crawl into bed from time to time.

Remember that a mattress and foundation are constructed to work together as a set. Putting a new mattress on an older foundation or platform bed will reduce the life of the mattress and may also void the warranty.

Quality mattresses today use a combination of coils, upholstery, foam and other supportive materials to provide proper support and cushioning. A mattress should give support and comfort for eight to ten years. A good quality bed frame is important for proper support. Keep in mind that larger mattresses (queen and king) work better with a frame that has an extra center support. You can prolong the life of your mattress if you turn it regularly to balance wear. Turn it end to end and turn it over every three or four months. Always use a washable mattress pad to keep the mattress surface clean. You may also want to place a protective covering on the foundation. Don't let children or rambunctious friends bounce on the bed like a trampoline. Jumping can damage the interior construction.