



The NBF Bed Buyers Guide

Do you need a new bed?

When's the right time for a new bed?

You can't beat a good night's sleep – it leaves you feeling fit, thinking sharply and happy!

The foundation of good sleep is a comfortable bed and the right mattress. It can be the difference between a restorative night's sleep and poor quality sleep that results in tiredness and fatigue.

Research shows that sleeping on an uncomfortable bed could rob you of up to an hour's sleep – yet the deterioration may be so gradual and invisible that many people fail to make the connection between an uncomfortable bed and poor sleep.

You may need a new mattress if...

Beds don't last forever. Even if it looks okay, it may not be giving you the support or comfort you need for a good night's sleep.

A mattress's life span is affected by several factors such as the quality, care and amount you use it (e.g. reading, watching TV & sleeping each night versus occasional use of a spare bed). Changes in lifestyle (marriage, new home) and in our bodies (losing or gaining weight, ageing, etc) can also necessitate a change of bed.

Here's a few things to consider:

Have you had your mattress more than seven years?

Do you wake up with stiffness and/or aches and pains?

Are you sleeping as well as you did a year ago?

Have you had a better night's sleep in a bed other than yours?

Does your mattress show signs of visible wear and tear (it sags, is lumpy etc)?

There are literally thousands of beds from which to choose and there's no such thing as the perfect type of bed for a particular condition or situation (e.g. one ideal bed for a back pain sufferer). Although a good retailer – and this booklet – will arm you with lots of information to make the process simpler only you can make the final, important decision - so take your time and make it wisely.

Shopping for a new bed

Before you go shopping for a new bed, think about what you want from your bed. Here are a few general points to think about:

- **Type.** What sort of style do you prefer? What do you like or dislike about your current bed? Do you prefer a firmer or softer feel?
- **The price is right.** Always shop for the best value not the lowest price. Of course, there are some perfectly acceptable, lower priced beds available (far preferable to an unhygienic second hand bed shaped to someone else's body) but the better the construction, the better the support and comfort and the longer the bed will last.
- **Size matters.** With a larger bed you are less likely to disturb your partner. You should be able to lie side by side, with your arms behind your head and your elbows out, without touching. Your bed should also be 4-6in (10-15cm) longer than the tallest partner – anyone over 6ft (1.8m) tall should consider a bed longer than standard. Many manufacturers make beds up to 7ft square as a matter of course; others will make special sizes.

Also consider the bed's height – many contemporary styles are low, while those with storage drawers may be much higher.

TYPICAL UK BED SIZES		
<i>N.B. Metric and imperial sizes are not exact equivalents.</i>		
NAME	IMPERIAL SIZE	METRIC SIZE
Small Single	2'6" x 6'3"	75 x 190 cm
Single	3' x 6'3"	90 x 190 cm
Small Double	4' x 6'3"	120 x 190 cm
Double	4'6" x 6'3"	135 x 190 cm
King	5' x 6'6"	150 x 200 cm
Super King	6' x 6'6"	180 x 200 cm

- **Check dimensions.** Bed sizes are not standardised and even if they have the same name (eg King size) they may not be the same size – especially if the mattress and base are not from the same manufacturer. European common sizes are different and many imported bedsteads come in European sizes.

- **Buy base and mattress together.** At the very least, make sure you try mattresses on a similar type of base. The two are designed to work together and a change of base will affect the feel and performance of the mattress.
- **Access all areas.** If you are worried about getting the bed upstairs, remember most divans have split bases; while many bedsteads are actually delivered in pieces for assembly in situ. To avoid problems with delivery, you should tell the retailer about potential access problems (narrow staircases, tight corners etc) before you buy. Check the retailer's terms and conditions.
- **After sales service.** Can't decide between two or three equally suitable products? Think about the retailer's service – e.g. quick delivery; guarantee or warranty offered; free disposal of your old bed; special offers; or even just the chemistry between yourself and the salesman.

It can be a false economy to change only the mattress and keep the original base, especially if you are buying a divan set. The old base could reduce the useful life of the new mattress as well as the support and comfort it can offer. It could also invalidate manufacturers' warranties or guarantees.

Buying that bed

You spend a third of your life in bed, so it's vital that you make the right choice.

Shop smarter by following these helpful tips:

- Try, try and try it again! There is no substitute for lying on mattresses when selecting the right one for you. You wouldn't buy a new car without taking it for a test drive first – and you'll be spending even more time in your bed! So wear comfortable clothes, remove your coat and shoes and lie on the bed for quite a long time – at least 10 minutes (preferably more). Adopt your normal sleeping position and lie on your side as well as your back.
- Always shop together if the bed's for two, to ensure you are both happy with your choice.
- Set aside enough time to do the job properly. Don't shop when you're tired or rushed – you run the risk that the beds will all feel wonderful.
- Correct support depends on your weight, height, build and even preferred sleeping position. Ideally the mattress should mould to the shape of your body while remaining supportive. When you lie on your side your spine should be horizontal. You should be able to turn fairly easily. As a general rule, the heavier you are, the firmer the tension you will need. You don't necessarily need a hard bed if you have a bad back (see page 15 for more information).
- Comfort is very subjective. Some people like the sensation of being cocooned in a bed; others prefer to lie on top of them. Back sleepers may like a firmer feel than people who sleep on their sides. There are lots of different "feels" around – you can choose what works best for you.
- Most manufacturers will offer mattresses in firm, medium and soft options. Try different options to be sure which is best for you. Remember there is no industry wide standard to compare firmness ratings from one manufacturer to the other.
- For partners of widely differing size and weight (3 stones/18kgs or more), different mattresses may be required. Some manufacturers make double beds from two single mattresses zipped together, which can be of differing tension. Others can combine different degrees of firmness in one mattress.

Look for the NBF Mark of Approval

For added reassurance that the bed or headboard you're buying is safe, clean and honest ie it is what it says it is, then look for the Approved logo. All members of the trade association, the National Bed Federation (NBF), must be independently audited to ensure they follow the procedures that comply with flammability, health and hygiene and trade descriptions regulations. For a current list of NBF Approved manufacturers visit www.bedfed.org.uk

Buying Online?

Shopping online has become a part of our everyday lives and it's certainly here to stay. It's often more convenient than shopping on your local high street, easier to compare prices and you may also find some products online which are not available in the shops. However make sure you check delivery costs as online retailers can have different rules on returning goods so establish their terms and conditions before starting your shopping.

If you are going to buy a bed online, then here's our top tips for shopping securely online:-

- Choose reputable shopping sites. If you haven't heard of the company, search for them on www.shopsafe.co.uk which lists only shops that offer secure credit card transactions, clear delivery prices and returns policies.
- Check the website has full contact details, phone numbers etc.
- Stick to reputable brands such as NBF Approved members. You can also check with them that they do regular business with that retailer.
- Ensure you are satisfied that the product descriptions you are given are true and accurate – you can't look inside a mattress!
- Is there any indication of country of origin?
- Ensure the website is secure before entering payment details.
- Check sellers' privacy policy and returns policy.
- Buying a mattress online may be cheaper and more convenient but there are drawbacks to not being able to see and touch items. That's why the Consumer Protection (Distance Selling) Regulations 2000 give you extra protection. For more information visit www.which.co.uk
- Remember a really cheap offer is cheap for a reason and you might not get what you bargained for!

A good way to check if the bed you are lying on is too soft, too hard, or just right is to lie on your back, and slide your hand in the hollow of your back. If it slides in too easily, the bed may be too hard for you (leading to pressure on your hips and shoulders); if it's a struggle to slide your hand in, then the bed is probably too soft. If you can move your hand with just a little resistance, the bed may be just right for you.

Sleep on this...the different types of mattress available

Mattresses may look similar, but the differences within are vast. This booklet gives a brief guide to some of the main options.

From the outside

The first thing you'll notice about a mattress is its cover – known in the trade as ticking. Manufacturers spend a lot of time choosing attractive colours and designs so their mattresses will look good – but remember that 99% of the time it will be covered up with bed clothes!

The ticking is not just there for its good looks: it also needs to be tough and tear resistant. Better quality cloths are woven or knitted in high quality viscose or cotton yarns. Cheaper cloths in polyester or polypropylene are often printed. At the budget end of the market are bonded or stitchbond fabrics and some cheaper knits.

Ticking with special qualities is now also increasingly being used by mattress manufacturers. Some of the options include anti-dust mite/anti allergy, anti-bacterial, anti-microbial, anti-static, breathable, water resistant, stain resistant, highly absorbent, naturally fire retardant etc.

But one of the most popular options are tickings that offer effective thermal regulation through moisture wicking and evaporation technology. There are now quite a few companies offering performance fabrics that move perspiration away from the body and through the fabric where it can evaporate quickly allowing you to feel cooler and more comfortable.

Quilting or tufting

Most mattresses are finished by either quilting or tufting. Quilting is a decorative effect attaching the outer fabric to the surface fillings; these mattresses tend to have a smoother, flatter surface. Tufting - where tapes are passed right through the mattress at regular intervals and secured each side by tags or washers - prevents loose fillings from being dislodged.

The side panels of some higher quality mattresses, particularly traditionally pocket spring mattresses, are hand side stitched which helps to keep the mattress in better shape for longer.

Inside a mattress

There are essentially two main types of mattress construction – those with and those without springs.

Spring interior mattresses

The majority of mattresses in the UK have spring interiors, which provide the 'core' support. Changing the spring construction, thickness (gauge) of the wire, the number of coils, height of each spring and the quantity alters the tension, feel and weight distribution properties of each mattress.

Spring interior mattresses can be 'zoned' - across the middle to give extra support for heavier hips and shoulders; half and half, to provide different tensions on each side of the bed; or round the edge of the mattress to give it extra rigidity.

Different tensions can be achieved within the same mattress. Some units also allow the user to adjust the mattress tension themselves.

There are three main types of spring interiors:

Type	Features
Open coil or open sprung	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Most widely used option, also known as the Bonnell spring. - Springs are arranged in rows and connected to one another, top and bottom, by a spiral helical wire with an outer rod strengthening the perimeter. - There are usually a minimum of 325 coils in a 5ft/150cm size - but some mattresses may have more. - Come in a choice of tensions, starting from a very firm 12.5 gauge wire. - Priced from budget to mid range.
Continuous spring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The continuous spring unit is made from a single length of wire 'knitted' into a series of interwoven springs which usually run up and down the bed and are linked vertically rather than horizontally. - The gauge of wires used is softer and the size of the 'coils' smaller than open coil, giving a higher spring count and a more responsive feel. - Priced in the mid market.
Pocket spring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small, softer springs that work independently from each other - Conforms and adjusts to body contours. - Helps eliminate roll together. - Spring counts typically vary from 600-800 up to 2,500 but can go up to 3 or even 4,000. Like other types they are made in a range of tensions. - Often more expensive and used mainly in higher quality products. - Better quality pocket springs are encased in calico pockets, hand nested in a honeycomb pattern and centre tied with linen cord. - Less expensive pocket springs are encased in fibretex or stitchbond fabrics and are lightly glued together in linear rows. <p>A relatively new development in spring is the extra low profile, mini spring – which can have a height under 3cm (1in). These units offer an alternative to fillings in providing a highly resilient comfort layer. They can also be stacked together to form a very soft, high spring count mattress core.</p>

Fillings

Interior sprung mattresses use a wide variety of fillings to create different properties and comfort options, as well as affecting price. Fillings are chosen for their resilience, durability, flexibility and ability to absorb body moisture. In cheaper mattresses, fillings usually come in compact pads; in better quality models, layers of loose fillings in greater volumes are often preferred.

filling	Function
Cotton	Often used near the surface for its soft feel and its ability to breathe, and to absorb moisture.
Wool	Naturally resilient fibre, creating a luxurious feel with good fire retardancy properties, it is also breathable.
Foam	Different types of foam are used for their cushioning effect. They include latex, polyurethane and visco-elastic (memory foam). Explanations of these different types of foam can be found on page 9.
Polyester	A synthetic material with good recovery properties
Hair	Highly resilient fibre, often described as “nature’s spring”. Available in pads or loose for high luxury.
Coir fibre pads	Made from coconut fibre are generally used next to the spring to insulate and prevent the spring being felt or penetrating. Alternatives include compressed wool or synthetic pads.
Silk, cashmere, mohair and other fine, natural fibres	Used for additional luxury and insulation properties.

Non Sprung Mattresses.

There are four main types: foam, gel, floatation and futons.

Foam

Most foam mattresses are made from layers of different densities of foam. By varying their density and depth, it’s possible to achieve different levels of comfort and support. They are particularly suitable for use with slatted bases and adjustable beds.

There are three main types of foam in use:

Latex

- A premium quality material derived from the sap of the rubber tree.
- Has a distinctive, resilient feel, is very durable and has anti-microbial properties that offer benefits to many allergy sufferers.

- Its natural elasticity means it recovers its shape immediately when pressure is removed.
- It also has very good point elasticity resulting in even distribution of pressure for independent support.

Visco elastic/Memory foam

- Responds to individual shape and pressure.
- Has good pressure relieving properties.
- Available in a variety of qualities and densities. (see page 16 for more details)

Polyurethane (Pu) foam

- A synthetic, petroleum based foam with performance and price varying according to density and quality.
- It is widely used and very versatile.

Gel

- A new filling that is taking the bed market by storm.
- Can be combined with other materials eg foam.
- Ground-breaking technology known for its cooling thermo regulating properties.
- Delivers such as breathability, pressure relief and body support.

Flotation beds

- Support is determined by the amount of water used and the level of motion can also be varied.
- Known for their pressure free support and also good for allergy sufferers.
- Variable temperature heaters keep the bed warm and cosy.

Futons

- Made from layers of cotton or fibre wadding, which moulds itself to the shape of the body.
- In Japan they are used on the floor with a mat underneath and rolled away during the day.
- In the UK, they are more often sold as budget priced sofa beds with slatted convertible frames.

Bed bases explained

Most mattresses are used in combination with one of various choices of bed base: such as divans, bedsteads, adjustable beds and bunk beds. Remember to ensure that mattress and base are suitable for use together, especially if you are buying them separately.

1. Divans

Divans are still the most popular style of base in the UK. They are essentially an upholstered box, fitted with castors for mobility or on legs to create space beneath. These days there are many beautifully tailored and upholstered bases with matching headboards offered in a range of colours and fabrics.

There are three main types of divan:-

- Sprung edge divans are the most luxurious option and feature a complete open coil or pocket spring unit mounted on a frame which acts like a giant shock absorber, increasing the mattress's durability.
- Solid or platform top divans have a rigid, non-sprung top panel, often made from hardboard. Beds with these bases are generally firmer, as well as cheaper than beds with sprung bases.
- Firm edge divans generally feature a smaller number of larger, heavy duty springs within a rigid, wooden sided frame.

A divan is useful if you're tight on space as most are available with drawers or lift-up storage, known as ottomans. Storage need not affect the comfort or quality of the bed – but it does cost a little more.

2. Slatted Bases

Slatted bases are mostly used with bedsteads. These can be either rigid (with no give) or flexible. Flexible slats are made from laminated soft woods mounted in a frame creating a modest level of springiness from their bowed shape. The tension of some slats can *be adjusted* to suit individual requirements.

The space between slats on most, cheaper, rigid bases is usually wider than on flexible slatted models but it is advisable to ensure the gap is not more than 9-10cm (approx 3in).

Wear and tear on a mattress will be greater the wider the gaps. Most manufacturers make their own recommendations for slat spacing to suit their own mattresses so check these before buying as they do vary.

3. Bedsteads

Bedsteads come in a vast array of styles from traditional classics to more modern designs and are available in wood, metal, plastics, upholstered or any combination of these.

Your choice will largely be an aesthetic one but bear in mind mattress support. This could be fixed or sprung slats or a metal grid or rigid woven wire. It is also possible to have a fully sprung bed base (with the same benefits as a divan) inside. A number of manufacturers make these to order.

Always make sure you try mattresses on the type of base your chosen bedstead has.

As many bedsteads are imported or antique they may not conform to current UK standard sizes so take care to ensure your mattress and bedstead are the same size!

4. Adjustable Bases

Adjustable beds are becoming increasingly popular as the bedroom becomes a multi-functional space. As well as reading or having breakfast in bed, people now watch TV from their beds and spend time on their laptops and mobile devices. Of course, adjustable beds still offer many benefits for a range of medical complaints requiring a raised sleeping position or raised legs or aid getting in and out of bed.

Styling choices range from a traditional divan look right through to contemporary bedstead designs. Some even incorporate massage units as an optional extra.

Available as single beds or as doubles with individually adjustable halves, these beds either feature flexible laminated slats or fully sprung upholstered sections. Some models have five or more individually adjusting sections - for neck, head, upper body legs and feet; other models might just adjust the head and feet; or even just the upper body. Some models are designed to slide backwards as the head end comes up, thus keeping you in more

convenient contact with your bedside table! Others fit side table which can be moved along side rails.

Mattresses are specially made for adjustable beds so ideally the base and mattress should be bought together. It's a good idea to make sure that any electrical parts are separately guaranteed and fully compatible with UK systems.

5. Bunk Beds

Bunk beds and cabin beds are a popular option for parents and children. They are fun as well as practical and space-saving. Our Good Night Guide for Children contains more information about bunk beds and sleep tips for youngsters. Visit www.sleepcouncil.org.uk for more information.

6. Headboards

Headboards have grown in popularity and can create a focal point in any bedroom. They are usually an optional extra to give you more choice but these days often coordinate with the divan base.

Like most things in the bedroom, your headboard acts as a style statement and will be a dominant feature, so it's worth doing a bit of research before you buy one. You should think what fabric you like, whether you want a simple rectangular design or a more lavish padded design and how the colour choice or pattern will blend in with the rest of the room. All of the different materials and designs have their own merits. For example, upholstered headboards give you more comfort where wooden headboards can give you sturdiness.

Pillow Talk

If you suffer with neck and shoulder pain, you may find your pillow's the culprit. They come in a range of different shapes and sizes, including pre-shaped ones that support your head and neck, as well as a choice of fillings – goosedown, duckdown, feather, fibre filled, and visco-elastic, latex or polyurethane foam – and any number of combinations of these.

Here's what to look for:

- A good one should hold your head in the correct alignment - that is, in the same relation to your shoulders and spine as if you were standing upright with the correct posture - and be tucked well into the neck and shoulder to support your head fully.
- The thickness and number you need depends on your body shape and your preferred sleeping position. You will need a thicker pillow (or two thinner ones) if you sleep on your side rather than if you sleep on your back.
- It is a good idea to invest in quality pillows and replace them at least every two or three years. When they have lost their 'loft' (height) and become lumpy, discoloured or misshapen they should be replaced.

An old, unwashed pillow could also contain as much as 10% of its weight in skin scale, mould, dead and living dust mites and their allergen laden droppings!

To top it off

Overlays and toppers are mostly used to soften the feel of a mattress, by adding extra layers of cushioning. Generally non-sprung, they may be made of a variety of materials - polyester fibre, latex, visco-elastic or other foams or even feathers. The choice is entirely subjective. Toppers are not a substitute for correct support – you'll need a mattress of the right tension. *Nor are they a substitute for replacing an old, worn out bed* – any impression of improved comfort will probably be short lived.

Some modern mattresses styles include a fixed topper – often on styles which have been designed to eliminate the need for turning.

Caring for your bed/mattress

However, like most new products, useful life-span depends on the amount of tender loving care the bed receives throughout its life.

Here are a few things to remember when you get your new bed home:

- **Do not bend or roll your new mattress.** It will permanently damage the spring unit and invalidate any warranties or guarantees.
- **Let the mattress breath.** Like a new car, a new bed may initially have a 'new' smell about it. This will eventually disperse if well aired.
- **Turn your mattress regularly.** Unless you have bought a non-turn (which has been specifically designed not be turned but must still be rotated), it is important that you turn your mattress from end to end and side to side every week for the first few months and thereafter about every three months. This will prolong the life-span of your mattress and minimise impression marks.
- **Body shaped impressions are normal.** Impression marks – sometimes known as settlement – are a normal characteristic of quality mattresses working as intended to conform to the shape of your body. These will be minimised with regular turning.
- **Getting used to your new bed.** Your body will take a while to adjust to sleeping on a new surface, so don't worry if your new bed doesn't immediately meet your expectations. Give it time – it could take a few weeks.

Your questions answered

What sort of bed should I choose if I have a bad back?

For a long time, it was believed that a hard bed was good for a bad back. Nowadays it's generally accepted that this is not necessarily the case – and could in fact cause more damage. A supportive and comfortable mattress is the best option – it doesn't matter what type of construction it is. Any reference to beds being orthopaedic – or similar medical sounding terms – does not automatically mean that the bed has been professionally assessed or recommended – it is a term loosely used by manufacturers to refer to extra firm models in their range.

What sort of bed is best for asthma sufferers or other types of allergy?

Almost all beds will, in time, attract house dust mites, whose droppings are highly allergenic. Regular cleaning, airing and the use of protective covers will reduce the effect. Some manufacturers are now using anti-dust mite treated fabrics for tickings. Always check details of construction and materials if you suffer from any other allergies. Manufacturers will be able to supply you with details.

Are foam mattresses hot?

Mattresses don't create the heat and people can get hot on beds of all constructions - and remember that age, health and medications can all affect your body's heat control mechanisms.

But foam is a good insulator and the higher the density (i.e. the better the quality) the greater the potential heat retention. Manufacturers are coming up with various novel solutions for climate control – from the cellular construction or the composition of the foam itself to aid breathability; to specially constructed ventilation layers; special springs to enhance air circulation; to warm sides and cool sides; to covers with the sort of technology you see in high performance clothing: fast drying and capable of allowing moisture to evaporate quickly.

Why are two similar mattresses so widely different in price?

Chances are they are not so similar they seem. They might both claim to be predominantly of the same construction – but further investigation will probably reveal different material qualities; densities; amounts; etc . If you want to comparative shop you will need quite a lot of detail to make sure you are comparing like for like.

What should I pay for a good mattress?

Prices for beds range from well under £100 to several thousands. As a general rule you get what you pay for. Remember that every £100 you spend on a new bed, actually presents an investment of just 2.7p a night (assuming a lifespan of seven years). A bargain bed is no bargain if you don't sleep well in it.

What happens to my old mattress?

Many retailers will offer to dispose of your old bed and take it away when they deliver your new one. More and more are sending these old mattresses off for recycling which is good news but it's worth digging a bit deeper to find out just how that recycling works. Some of it may just be crushed up and going back into landfill. Some old mattresses or old components and fillings are making their way back into production without proper processing. So look for NBF Approved Members to ensure that the product you're buying is safe, clean and honest.

Which is better – tufted or quilted?

Better quality tufts are well protected by wool or felt pompoms but some more sensitive people may be more aware of them than others. A good mattress protector can help. Otherwise, choose a quilted style instead.

Will I notice any difference between rigid and flexible slats?

Not only are they likely to feel different – rigid slats will give a bed a firmer feel – but they will affect the durability of the mattress – rigid slats have no give and work against the mattress, leaving it to do all the work; sprung slats work with the mattress and will prolong its life and improve comfort levels.

My mattress is not the same size as the base?

There could be two reasons for this. You may not have bought the same size mattress as base. There are so many different sizes on the market these days, it is important to check actual dimensions, in the same scale (metric or imperial) to be sure of a size match. Don't go by names alone – one shop's king size may not be the same another's!

The other reason might be because of the construction. In transit or storage, mattress springs can sometimes nestle into each other temporarily reducing with the length or width. During use, the mattress should recover its original dimension. The effect is likely to be more pronounced if the spring unit does not have a perimeter frame or the mattress is not fully hand side stitched – ideally a mattress should have one or the other feature to ensure it keeps its shape.

Back page: Useful Contacts**Allergy UK**

Planwell House
LEFA Business Park
Edington Way
Sidcup, Kent DA14 5BH
Allergy Helpline: 01322 619898
www.allergyuk.org
email: info@allergyuk.org

BackCare

The Charity for Healthier Backs
16 Elmtree Road
Teddington
Middlesex, TW11 8ST
Helpline: 0845 130 2704
www.backcare.org.uk
email: info@backcare.org.uk

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy

14 Bedford Row
London WC1R 4ED
020 7306 6666
www.csp.org.uk
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The Sleep Council

High Corn Mill
Chapel Hill
Skipton
North Yorkshire BD23 1NL
01756 791089
www.sleepcouncil.org.uk
email: info@sleepcouncil.org.uk

Osteopathic Information Service

General Osteopathic Council Osteopathy
House
176 Tower Bridge Road
London SE1 3LU
020 7357 6655
www.osteopathy.org.uk
Email: info@osteopathy.org.uk