

AND SO TO BED

As a Chartered Physiotherapist I can't begin to count the number of times I've been asked what the best sort of bed is. To somebody who looks at a wonderful number of variations of the human form every day that's rather like asking what the best size shoe is. The bed that gives you the most perfect night's sleep may keep your poor spouse tossing and turning all night long. She may be able to drop off comfortably with 3 fluffy pillows, whereas you fling your one pillow on the floor as soon as you fall asleep. The truth is that people have different needs when it comes to beds and pillows, and these needs may change as time goes on.

The common perception is that a hard bed is a good bed, the harder the better. I've known many people go and spend large amounts of money on the hardest bed they could find and then not be able to get a wink's sleep. Hard beds are not for everyone. Very thin and also very heavy people tend to find them quite uncomfortable. Certain types of back conditions can be made quite uncomfortable by the unyielding surface of a hard bed. However they can be suitable for some people. Older people who are finding it hard to turn over in bed will usually find it easier to move around and get in and out of a firmer bed than a soft one.

Softer beds also have some advantages. Certain types of neck and shoulder conditions are better in a soft rather than a hard bed. It also can be easier to lie on your side on a soft bed, especially if you tend towards the large side. Some people find it easier to lie on their stomach on a soft rather than a hard bed. Turning over is more difficult, however, and if you have arthritic knees or hips, moving around in or getting out of a low soft bed can be very difficult indeed.

So if you're feeling a bit uncomfortable in the bed and you think that you need a change, what should you do? Well for starters get into your old bed for a while and think about all the things that you find uncomfortable about it. It's important to figure that out or you may end up with a new bed that's no better. If you find it difficult to struggle out of bed, or have a noticeable dip in the mattress, then you need something a little harder than what you have. Now it may not be necessary to purchase a completely new bed in order to get one that's a bit firmer or higher. Try putting a sheet of chipboard between the mattress and the base. This will give extra firmness and often works well with a mattress that's in reasonably good shape. Extra height can be gained by raising the legs of the bed on bed blocks. You can get these in some furniture shops or in hospital supply shops. If you feel that the bed is hard, unyielding and leaves you stiff in the morning then you could try putting several folded blankets between the mattress and the sheet. It's also possible to buy special soft foam mattress covers or mats, which have the same softening effect.

But maybe you've tried all this and decided that there's nothing for it but a new bed then be prepared to try out a lot of beds. Go into the shop with some idea of whether you want a softer or harder bed and get to the salesperson to show you a few beds of this sort. Also make sure to ask for a higher bed if you need one. Then go and lie down on the beds you're looking at. Try out a few and then when you've narrowed it

down to between 2 or 3, lie down on each of them for at least 10 minutes. Lie down in the position that you fall asleep in. Think about all the bad things with your old bed – does the new bed have any of these problems? If so, it's not the one for you, and try another one. Remember, the most expensive or the hardest bed is not necessarily the best bed for you, the most comfortable one is. The more expensive beds are more likely to be more durable and as such are a better investment. But unless the bed is comfortable there's no point in buying it. Sleep tight!

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