

# sleep easy

Tossing and turning over which mattress to buy?  
Rest assured with our buyers' guide to beds

WORDS VANESSA KEYS



As tiredness hits, there's nothing more appealing than falling into a beautifully made bed: plumped pillows, fresh sheets and, ideally, a comfortable mattress. If you continually wake feeling lethargic, complaining of aches and pains, or are swallowed up in your sleep by a decades-old mattress, it's time to replace it. "It's difficult to get deep sleep on a mattress that's too small, too soft, too hard or too old," explains physiotherapist Sarah Key. "Since you'll spend a third of your life in your bed, a quality mattress and foundation is one of the most important, valuable and cost-effective purchases you can make." Buying a mattress can be an expensive investment, but equipped with the facts, it will be a sensible one. >



## bed basics

**Spring mattresses** or inner-spring mattresses consist of spring coils that are wrapped within polyester wadding and polyurethane foam. They're popular as they distribute weight evenly and give good air circulation. A **comfort layer** affects how hard or soft a spring mattress feels when you lie upon it. Expect to pay top dollar for silk, wool, latex, goose down and premium foams and less for reclaimed cotton fibres and lower-grade foam. Lesser-grade padding often means the mattress won't last as long as the padding can break apart, losing the capacity to spring back.

**Foam mattresses** don't contain springs and are made from a basic polyurethane foam, often spotted in sofa beds, or a high-quality memory foam, also known as viscoelastic. Highly sensitive to weight and temperature, memory foam moulds itself to your shape, using the body's heat to provide a personalised sleeping surface.

**Latex mattresses** are also spring-free and feature a hygienic pin-core design that lets the mattress breathe and reduces moisture build-up. Latex is anti-fungal, anti-microbial and hypoallergenic.

**Natural mattresses**, made from natural materials like horse hair, camel hair, cotton, wool or natural latex, are a great solution for eco-savvy shoppers and some allergy sufferers. Grand Soleil mattresses, available from Beyond Furniture, are made from renewable resources, are toxin free and provide great support.

## good foundations

The next step towards sleep nirvana is deciding what your mattress will sit on. An **ensemble** includes a sprung base that sits underneath the mattress, which acts like a shock absorber and takes a lot of the wear and tear. It can also extend the life of your mattress, as your body weight is more evenly distributed.

When cared for properly, a mattress on a **slatted base** will last just as long as an ensemble, so it really comes down to personal preference. "A mattress on a slatted base will feel firmer than the same mattress on a sprung base. If the mattress you're testing in store is on a sprung base, ask the staff if they will place it on the floor to test how it would feel on a slatted base," suggests Andrea Carlon of Sleepmaker. If you do choose a slatted bed base, ensure the slats aren't too far apart – about five centimetres is ideal.

## Decisions, Decisions

"People often don't realise that a poor-quality or worn-out mattress can seriously affect your sleeping patterns. That's why choosing the right bed for your individual needs is so important," says Stuart Jones from Bedshed. The first step is to try before you buy. "Lie down and relax," advises Chris Cadzow from Ikea. "Spend at least 10 minutes on every mattress, and make sure you lie in your usual sleeping position, with a pillow under your head and neck. Move around a bit, too – just like you would at home!" A good mattress should provide even, gentle support for your whole body and keep your spine in the same position as a person with good standing posture. Can't agree with your partner on a mattress? Sleep Number beds, available at Domayne and selected Harvey Norman stores, feature air chambers that can be adjusted to the preferred comfort and firmness on each side of the bed.

## serious support

A properly fitted mattress is crucial to maintaining a healthy spine and neck. We asked renowned physiotherapist Sarah Key – who treats the aches and pains of the Royal Family – to share her advice on proper support for the back. "A mattress should be firm enough that it buoys up the body, so you feel like you are being pushed up from below, and that your movements at night are 'spring-loaded'," she says. "The danger of choosing a mattress that's too soft is that it lets the spine sag during the night, which can result in a stiff and painful back. A good sign of a competent mattress is one that bounces you back when you sit down on the side of the bed."

## sleep talk

**Side sleepers:** "Try a mattress that's less firm, like latex or memory foam," says Chris Cadzow from Ikea. "Sleeping on your side means your spine should remain straight – the mattress needs to cradle your body and allow the shoulders and hips to sink into the mattress."

**Back and stomach sleepers:** Chris suggests a firm mattress, like a pocket-spring or hourglass spring mattress. "If you sleep directly on your back or stomach, the lower back needs extra support, and it's imperative to stop the body from sinking too deep into the mattress."

## the care factor

"You should be changing your mattress every seven to 10 years to ensure maximum benefit and hygiene," says Drew Warren-Smith of Snooze. "Each night we shed dead skin cells and can produce up to a litre of sweat, creating an unhygienic environment that dust mites thrive on." Michael Cleghorn of Freedom recommends rotating your mattress end to end every three months. "You should also invest in a good-quality mattress protector and air your mattress for at least an hour while you're changing the bed linen," he says. If the mattress gets stained, use washing powder to spot clean it.

## buyer's checklist

1. Write a list of things you want out of your mattress – this will help both you and the salesperson determine the right fit.
2. Wear comfortable clothing and if you share a bed, take your partner along to make sure the mattress suits you both.
3. Give yourself time to shop around – take about 10 minutes to lie down on each mattress to get a good feel for it.
4. Find a salesperson who will walk you through your options.
5. Don't make false savings. "A top-quality mattress requires three times the manufacturing time than other mattresses, because there are more comfort layers and support systems built in," says Brent Tyrrell from Sleep City. "Buy the best you can afford now, even if it means stretching yourself a little bit – it will be an investment in your health and wellbeing."

## LATEX

### Sealy Oasis Natural Latex 'Pearl' ensemble

**Price:** from \$3499/queen mattress; from \$5199/ensemble. **Features:** 100% natural latex core for support, with wool layers to manage temperature. **Comfort level:** Soft. **Best for:** Sensitive sleepers and allergy sufferers. **Contact:** Bedshed, 1300 364 622, [www.bedshed.com.au](http://www.bedshed.com.au).



## SPRING

### Sleepmaker 'Physio Choice' ensemble

**Price:** from \$1649/queen mattress; \$1999/ensemble. **Features:** Its five-zone continuous coil spring system, endorsed by the Australian Physiotherapy Association, allows correct spinal alignment. **Comfort level:** Soft, medium or firm. **Best for:** Those needing spinal support. **Contact:** Bedshed, 1300 364 622.



## FOAM

### Sultan 'Flokenes' mattress

**Price:** \$749/queen. **Features:** A layer of memory foam and five comfort zones for support with lamb's-wool filling for comfort and a regulated sleeping climate. **Comfort level:** Medium. **Best for:** Memory foam devotees who want a quality mattress at a great price. **Contact:** Ikea, (02) 8002 0400, [www.ikea.com.au](http://www.ikea.com.au).



### Sultan 'Elsfjord' mattress

**Price:** \$699/queen. **Features:** Five comfort zones to relieve pressure, while latex provides ventilation and overall body support. **Comfort level:** Firm. **Best for:** Those wanting to upgrade to a firmer, posture-friendly mattress without breaking the bank. **Contact:** Ikea, (02) 8002 0400, [www.ikea.com.au](http://www.ikea.com.au).



### 'Paterson' mattress

**Price:** \$999/queen. **Features:** Hourglass springs form a soft but firm bed with layers of foam, latex and wool, and an organic cotton covering provides comfort. **Comfort level:** Soft. **Best for:** Sleepers who crave a luxurious, cost-effective mattress. **Contact:** Freedom, 1300 135 588, [www.freedom.com.au](http://www.freedom.com.au).



### Posture Practic Visco-Fair ensemble

**Price:** \$1999/queen mattress; \$2309/ensemble. **Features:** Latest innovations in memory foam, an organic cotton covering, with the foam endorsed by the National Asthma Council and Good Environmental Choice Australia. **Comfort level:** Available in soft, medium or firm. **Best for:** Those with allergies. **Contact:** Sleep City, [www.sleepcity.com.au](http://www.sleepcity.com.au).



### Innergetic 'Zest Gel' ensemble

**Price:** \$4199/queen mattress; \$4999/ensemble. **Features:** Seven-zoned latex core with layers of gel, a gentle foam comfort layer and a wool-blend foam quilt layer to help regulate temperature. **Comfort level:** Medium. **Best for:** Restless sleepers who need extra support. **Contact:** Harvey Norman, 1300 464 278, [www.harveynorman.com.au](http://www.harveynorman.com.au).



### Sultan 'Hamnö' mattress

**Price:** \$499/queen. **Features:** Active pocket springs provide precise body support and relieve pressure while the high-resilient foam and extra-thick wadding give increased comfort. **Comfort level:** Medium. **Best for:** Budget-savvy buyers who want a comfortable mattress that will last. **Contact:** Ikea, (02) 8002 0400, [www.ikea.com.au](http://www.ikea.com.au).



### Grand Soleil 'Triocell' natural mattress

**Price:** \$2950/queen. **Features:** made from renewable resources, this mattress is toxin free and provides breathability, contours to your body and is dust mite resistant, non-allergenic and anti-bacterial. **Comfort level:** Available in soft, medium or firm. **Best for:** Asthma and allergy sufferers. **Contact:** Beyond Furniture, 1300 112 233, [www.beyondfurniture.com.au](http://www.beyondfurniture.com.au).



### Posture Practic Natural Latex 'Eco' ensemble

**Price:** \$2599/queen mattress; \$2909/queen ensemble. **Features:** Eco-friendly 100% natural latex provides support and comfort with a latex 'pillow top' that offers zoned support for correct postural alignment. **Comfort level:** Available in soft, medium or firm. **Best for:** Eco-conscious sleepers who want a healthy sleeping environment. **Contact:** Sleep City, [www.sleepcity.com.au](http://www.sleepcity.com.au).



### Slumberland 'Ascot' ensemble

**Price:** from \$1899/queen mattress; \$2399/ensemble. **Features:** The checkerboard pocket spring system ensures minimal partner disturbance and gives extra support for the hips and lower back. **Comfort level:** Medium. **Best for:** Troubled sleepers who require the very best support and superior resistance. **Contact:** Snooze, 1800 674 089, [www.snooze.com.au](http://www.snooze.com.au).



### Madison 'Equinox' Pillow Top platform ensemble

**Price:** from \$2999/queen mattress; \$3599/ensemble. **Features:** Memory foam provides deep-cushioned support, with an added option of a built-in TemptraKon topper to regulate temperature. **Comfort level:** Medium. **Best for:** Those who want medium support but still crave a soft touch. **Contact:** Snooze, [www.snooze.com.au](http://www.snooze.com.au).



## buzzwords

**Hourglass springs (or Bonnell system):** Springs tied together with spiral wires to form a mat. The more they're compressed, the firmer they get, resulting in a 'soft but firm' mattress.

**Continuous coil spring system:** A system boasting high-density coils, which give greater support and minimise partner disturbance.

**Memory foam:** A dense and heavy but supportive polyurethane that reacts to body heat, allowing it to mould to your body shape.

**Open-ended coils:** Coils joined together part-way down the spring, leaving the top free, which gives more bounce and firmer support.

**Pocket springs:** A supportive grid of springs in individual fabric pockets.

**Pillow-top mattresses:** A mattress with a thick layer of padding attached to the top and bottom, recommended for extra comfort. 