



How to choose the best mattress to prevent back pain

85% of Australian adults will suffer back pain at some stage in their lives. It can affect some more than others, until it becomes an effort just to get out of bed. That's why choosing a good mattress that is suited to your needs can be the first step in looking after your back. Sleeping on the wrong mattress has negative consequences for anyone suffering from back pain. We have all been somewhere and had to sleep on the foldout sofa bed or on the spare mattress, waking up the next morning not fully rested, and with a stiff back, as we tossed and turned all night trying to find a comfortable position.

A mattress that is lacking in back support will not keep your spine in good alignment, strains muscles and reinforces poor sleeping posture, all of which can increase the chances of suffering low back pain. You sacrifice sleep comfort if you do not choose a mattress that matches your individual preferences. A mattress that will provide both sleep comfort and back support helps to reduce low back pain, as it allows the structures of the spine to rest and rejuvenate during the night. With the variety of mattresses on the market, choosing the right mattress can be a confusing decision. The following practical guidelines are designed to help you choose the best mattress for back support and sleep comfort.

Personal preference should ultimately determine what mattress to purchase

Any mattress that helps you sleep without pain and stiffness is the best mattress for you. There is no single mattress that works for all people with low back pain. You should choose the mattress that meets your own standards for comfort and support and allows you to get a good night's sleep.

Understand and enquire about the physical components of the mattress

The coils or inner springs inside the mattress provide back support. Different mattresses vary in the number and arrangement of coils. Padding on the top of the mattress provides comfort and comes in many different thicknesses. Mattress depth typically ranges anywhere from 18 to 45 centimetres. Choosing the number of coils, type of padding and mattress depth should be determined by your own preferences for back support and sleep comfort.

Find a mattress with sufficient back support to reduce low back pain

A good mattress should provide support while allowing for the natural curves and alignment of the spine. Proper back support from the mattress also helps you to avoid muscle soreness in the morning. A recent study indicates that a medium-firm mattress usually provides better back pain relief than a firm mattress.

Achieve a balance between having back support and sleep comfort when buying a mattress

Overall comfort while sleeping on the mattress is equally as important as sufficient back support. Sleeping on a mattress that is too firm can cause aches and pains on pressure points. A medium-firm mattress may be more comfortable because it allows the shoulder and hips to sink in slightly, all the while maintaining the spine in a good alignment. Patients who want a firmer mattress for back support can get one with thicker padding for greater comfort.

Know when it's time to get a new mattress

If an old mattress sags visibly in the middle or if you are no longer sleeping comfortably on the mattress, it is probably time to purchase a new one. Putting boards under a sagging mattress is only short-term fix and may cause more back problems and complicate any existing low back pain in the long run. On average a good mattress will last approximately between 10-15 years if looked after correctly.

Shop for the best value and quality of the mattress rather than price

Finding a high-quality mattress is usually worth the investment, considering the effect a mattress can have on low back pain and sleep comfort. The cost of a mattress over a 10 year period comes to less per day than a cup of coffee. Mattresses with more coils and thicker padding tend to be higher quality and also more expensive. However, a higher price is no guarantee that the mattress is more comfortable or more supportive than a less expensive mattress.

Be aware of mattress advertising gimmicks

Claims that a mattress is 'orthopedic' or 'medically-approved' should be viewed sceptically. Many companies apply these descriptions without any research or reviews of the product. The companies that do test are Sleeppeeze (Endorsed by Chiropractic & Osteopathic Association of Australia, COCA), Sleepmaker (Endorsed by the Chiropractors Association of Australia, CAA) and Sealy.

Give the mattress a test-run before you buy

You wouldn't buy a car without driving it first. You can try sleeping on different makes and models of mattresses in hotels or at other people's homes before going to a mattress store. When shopping at the store, you should lie on the mattress with your shoes off for several minutes in your usual sleeping position to decide if it is a good fit. If two people will be sleeping on the mattress, you should both test it at the same time, to make sure you each have enough space and are both comfortable on the same style of mattress. Testing a variety of mattresses is necessary because mattress companies use different ratings of firmness and padding.

Purchase mattresses from stores and companies that are trustworthy

Consider the customer service offered by the mattress store, such as delivery options, warranty, removal of old mattresses and especially the store's return policy. Look for mattress stores where customers can return a mattress if they are not satisfied with the quality or comfort after sleeping on it for a significant amount of time (i.e. a couple of weeks to a month).

Take good care of the new mattress

It doesn't matter if you bought the best mattress on the market, if you don't take good care of it, it will not last. It is recommended that you reposition your mattress every six months to ensure that the mattress is evenly worn. This includes rotating it 180 degrees and flipping the mattress lengthwise on a regular basis.

Choosing a good pillow is another important factor for sleep comfort, rest and the health of the spine

A good pillow should be able to support the neck, but at the same time be comfortable. It must not be too low or too high. A good rule of thumb is to measure from the tip of your shoulder to your neck on the same side. This measurement should be the maximum height of your pillow. There are many pillows on the market today, in a variety of different materials, such as memory foam, water-based and latex to just to name a few. Most pillows need to be changed approximately every 2 years to provide maximum support.

All mattresses and pillows can help, but only if they are suited to your posture and comfort needs. If you have any questions, ask us here at Shirley Rd Chiropractic and we would be more than happy to help you find the right pillow and/or mattress for your particular needs.