



Sleeping - mattresses and beds



If you have difficulty sleeping or wake tired, stiff and sore, it may be time to replace your old mattress, or bed and mattress combination, and review the condition of your pillow. If you have additional or specific needs you may need to use bed-related equipment to help you with moving and positioning yourself in bed and with getting in and out of bed. You may need to consider having an adjustable bed.

Selection of an appropriate mattress, bed and bed-related equipment will help you and will assist carers who may be attending to you when you are in bed.

It is important that your mattress, pillow, and bed are chosen according to your needs. Bed-related equipment should be used safely, to prevent injury whilst you are in bed, or during bed transfers.

When choosing a bed, make sure that it is compatible with transfer equipment such as a hoist, and other bed-related equipment.

This information sheet contains guidelines for mattress, pillow and bed selection. Information sheets about adjustable beds and bed-related equipment are also available.

Mattresses, pillows, beds and bed-related products are on display at ILC Tas.

Choosing the right mattress

Choice of mattress is a personal and individual decision. There are many types of mattresses on the market, ranging from soft to firm. The mattress which is right for one person will not necessarily be right for another person. Sleeping on a saggy or lumpy mattress can cause back, neck pain and irritability.

- A mattress should offer firm support that allows you to roll over easily.
- It should have a soft cushioning layer that contours to the shape of your body to reduce pressure areas, and ensure that your spine is well supported and your body aligned.
- Buy the best quality mattress you can afford, but remember it must be comfortable. Better quality mattresses are usually made from materials that will give you good support and will usually last 10–15 years, depending on how they are treated. Just because a mattress is expensive, it is not necessarily the right one for you.
- When you lie on the mattress on your back you should be supported without a gap between the mattress and your back. You can check this by placing your hands under your lower back. When you lie on your side the mattress should hold your spine straight.



Good alignment



Too soft



Too hard

Buying a mattress

Go to a reputable bedding retailer who has a large range of mattresses and try before you buy. Look for comfort and good quality materials. Before buying a mattress it is recommended that you lie on as many as possible in your price range to find out which is best. To decide which mattress is the most comfortable, lie on it for at least 20 minutes. Try rolling into different positions to make sure that moving on the mattress is easy. Check that you are well supported and that there are no gaps between you and the mattress. If you share your bed make sure both you and your partner lie on the mattress together in your usual sleeping positions.

Which type of mattress to choose

Mattresses are usually made from foam with different densities, latex or specifically-designed inner springs. A mattress for an adjustable bed needs to be flexible and able to bend with the movement of the bed. Conventional inner spring mattresses are not suitable for electrically adjustable beds. Some pressure-relieving mattresses are suitable for adjustable beds. Cheaper mattresses may use materials such as natural fibre or less supportive foam.

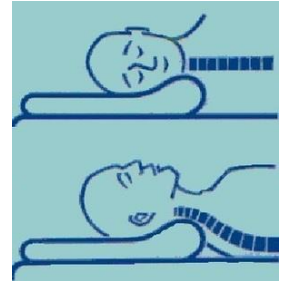
- **Inner spring mattresses** consist of an internal spring system which determines the level of support (pocket springs that can move independently or continuous springs that are interlinked and give good support) and an outer layer of padding which determines the level of comfort. Better quality mattresses usually have stronger wire, more springs and use more comfortable padding materials such as latex, wool and quality foam. They tend to last longer.
- **Multi-zonal inner spring mattresses** have five different zones of support that follow the shape of your body, maintaining good posture as you sleep. Some ranges of this type of mattress have been tested and endorsed by the Australian Physiotherapy Association – see www.physiotherapy.asn.au – Resources. Many inner spring mattresses are pillow-top or single sided mattresses. When purchasing a *pillow-top* mattress ensure that the pillow-top padding is good quality and long lasting. Poor quality padding on top may compress quickly, compounded by the fact that you cannot flip the mattress, so you are always sleeping on the same side. You may find that indentations form on the mattress where you normally sleep, making moving in bed more difficult. Make sure you rotate the mattress every month. Double/Queen mattresses can have different zones of support for each person.
- **Memory foam mattresses** mould to your body shape to give even support. Memory foam is heat and weight sensitive. Memory foam mattresses reduce pressure on sensitive bony areas and usually offer a high level of comfort. It can be harder to move in your sleep as the mattress moulds to your body shape. However, movement is needed while you are sleeping, to maintain circulation and joint mobility during the night and to lessen the risk of developing pressure areas. When testing, try lying in one position for about 20 minutes, then see if you can still roll easily. If so, then a memory foam mattress may suit you. If not, try a different type of mattress. The memory foam may be the top layer of a mattress, or it could be a separate topper placed onto a mattress. Memory foams that mould and re-mould more quickly, make it easier to turn in bed.
- **Latex mattresses** offer good support and have the advantage of being low allergenic. They are a good option for people with allergies. They can be heavy and require two people to turn them. Some people may find them hot in summer.
- **Foam mattresses** come in various densities of firmness for support, are inexpensive and lightweight, and flatten with use. Depending on the quality of manufacture and materials used, **futons** and **sofa beds** may not be suitable for sleeping on for any length of time.

How to care for your new mattress

A mattress will last significantly longer if it is looked after than if care practices are not followed. If your mattress is single-sided (pillow-top) rotate it once a month. If it is double-sided flip it one month and rotate it the next. This will ensure that the mattress wears more evenly and lasts longer. Mattresses are heavy and ideally you should not turn one on your own.

Choosing a pillow

Just as your bed should provide good support for your body, your pillow should give you the right cushioning to position your head and neck properly. It should hold your head in the same relation to your shoulders and spine as if you were standing with correct upright posture. If you sleep on your side, you may want a fairly firm pillow to give your head and neck extra support.



If you sleep on your back, try a medium-firm pillows to cradle your head with more 'give'. If you sleep on your stomach (although some doctors caution against this position) choose a soft pillow to lessen the strain on your neck. There is a variety of price levels for pillows. Shopping for the right pillow is an essential part of building your sleep system.

The timeframe for how long a pillow can be used often depends on the quality of the pillow. Generally, pillows should be replaced when they have lost their original shape and fullness. Additionally, pillows can show signs of wear and tear over time. If you notice the following signs, you should consider replacing your pillow:

- It no longer feels the way it did when you first bought it
- It shows visible signs of dirt
- It feels lumpy and bumpy

Choosing a bed

When replacing your mattress, have a look at the bed base. If it is sagging, damaged or well worn, replace it as well. Putting your mattress on a good quality base will improve the comfort of your mattress and make it last longer.

Which type of base to choose

- **Ensemble base** – Good quality ensemble bases will have springs to support the mattress, whereas the cheaper ones may just be a wooden box with fabric covering.
- **Flexible slats** allow a little movement and better for foam or latex mattresses.
- **Fixed slats** are rigid and provide good support for inner spring mattresses. Discuss the bed base and recommended mattress type with a bedding advisor.
- **Waterbeds** – Choosing a waterbed with baffles to reduce water movement will minimise unwanted movement of the bed and keep water levels at the correct height to maintain good support. The warmth of the water can be soothing if you are in pain but you may find it hard to roll over or to get out of bed.

When choosing a bed, also check:

- **Size** – Is there clearance on the mattress of at least 15 cm around your body?
- **Height** – Can you get on and off the bed easily? Is it a comfortable height for bed-making?
- **Edges** – Are they firm and easy to get off? Edges that collapse easily have been known to cause people to slide off the bed if their mobility is poor.
- **Size or room** – Is there enough room for people to move around the bed or to manoeuvre a wheelchair or hoist if necessary?
- **Customising** – Are there options for different bed sizes and mattress types?
- **Guarantee** – What is the length of the warranty and what does it cover?
- **Clearance** – If it is necessary to use transfer equipment for getting into and out of bed, is there enough clearance under the bed for use of equipment such as a hoist?
- **Compatibility** – If bed-related transfer equipment such as an over-bed pole or a bed stick needs to be used, is the bed compatible?
- **Load capacity** is the maximum occupant-weight recommended by the manufacturer for a product. It varies between beds. It is important for the occupant's safety that their weight is not greater than the load capacity. Beds with higher load capacities are available. Load capacity may also be written as SWL or load test. A kilogram (kg) weight is then provided.

Alternatives to buying a new bed or mattress

- If the problem is a soft base, make it firmer with wooden slats or a board fixed securely under the mattress.
- If the mattress is not providing enough pressure relief, or red areas are appearing on the skin, get professional advice as soon as possible. A pressure relieving mattress or mattress overlay may be recommended. **Contact ILC Tas 1300 885 886 for advice about selecting and using different types of pressure relieving mattresses and mattress overlays.**



For information about adjustable beds and bed equipment please refer to ILC Tas information sheets:

Sleeping – adjustable beds

Sleeping – bed equipment

Contact ILC Tas for more information



Ring **1300 885 886** to speak to a health professional



Visit our website www.ilctas.asn.au, or email us at ilc@ilctas.asn.au



Make an appointment to visit our centre at 275 Wellington Street, South Launceston



Ring us to find out when we will be visiting your area

ILC Tas is a not-for-profit organisation and does not sell equipment.

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