



## LEARNING ABOUT MATTRESSES

### a) A nod and forty winks on the right mattress! (Part 1)

According to the proverb, as you make your bed, so you must lie in it, and if it's badly made, then you're not likely to get much sleep! Because it is a well-known fact that sleep is a fundamental part of the lives of every human being, and when you can't sleep, all your physical, intellectual and psychological capacities are in jeopardy. Sleep helps us to rest after a hard day's work, it's a release for physical and emotional tension, and it restores our strength so we can start again the next day.

But although sleep is a completely natural phenomenon, we need to take a few important measures to make sure it is as restful and recuperative as possible. The bedroom should be neither too hot nor too cold, the air should contain the right amount of moisture, there should be no disruptive noises and you should have the right mattress.

#### Which is the "right" mattress?

That's a difficult question to answer, since not everyone has the same needs, and often our expectations and opinions differ as a result of different experiences and information. For instance, some people are fond of "granny's mattress", or rather the good old wool mattress. These are still made by specialist craftsmen, and are warm and soft.

However, they are considered outdated, as they do not provide enough support for the spinal column and are easily deformed. On the good side, they are breathable and absorb body moisture, but they are not recommended for allergy sufferers since they are good nesting grounds for dust mites.

Moreover, wool mattresses require high maintenance, as they need to be reupholstered at least once every two years, and the wool washed, combed and integrated, owing to its tendency to be flattened by body moisture. Spring mattresses are today's international bestseller.

They have come a long way since the first models appeared three hundred years ago! Nowadays they have outer covers made of breathable materials, a layer of natural fibre wadding, layers of shock-absorbing polyurethane foam or latex and felt, and a series of springs. The spring system is the most important feature of these mattresses.

There are different types of springs, made of steel wire in a variety of diameters and weights. The minimum number of springs required to ensure a good structure and support is 192 in a single bed and 384 in a double bed.

Versions with removable covers and synthetic stuffing are effective in preventing colonisation by dust mites. A common feature of all spring mattresses is that they provide good support, and this is particularly useful for people with large builds, for those who perspire a lot and for those who live in hot regions.

Another favoured mattress these days is the latex mattress. Latex is secreted from the cortex of plants belonging to the Euphorbia family. It has been used since ancient times, and today it finds particularly useful application in medical aids (such as surgical gloves and teats for nursing infants), tyres and mattresses. Experience shows that the ideal combination is a blend of natural and synthetic latex (latex molecules produced in laboratory conditions), which is more stable, resistant, lighter and completely hypoallergenic. When choosing a latex mattress, it is important, in this case too, to look out for a good outer covering, beneath which is a layer of natural fibre wadding and then a core made of single or double-cell latex.

Latex mattresses support the body by responding to single points of pressure and so they are extremely accommodating. They are very elastic, resistant, insulating and hence ideal in both hot and cold climates.

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## a) A nod and forty winks on the right mattress! (Part 2)

Versions with removable covers and synthetic stuffing are effective in preventing colonisation by dust mites. More recent models provide different degrees of support in relation to the area of the body. An alternative to the latex mattress is made of polyurethane, a plastic material invented in 1935. These mattresses are resistant, ergonomic, and extremely elastic and ensure that air circulation inside is good.

They should have a suitable outer cover around a layer of natural fibre padding and a core consisting of a sheet of polyurethane, either in a single layer or in smaller pieces with different levels of support for different parts of the body. Opting for a polyurethane mattress means you are getting a product that is non-deformable, flexible (it adapts easily to the shape of the person lying on it) and insulating.

Also in this case, versions with removable covers and synthetic stuffing are effective in preventing colonisation by dust mites.

There are other types of mattress, that are less widely known, but which probably owe their success to passing trends.

This is true for the water mattress, which first appeared as far back as 1813. It is very heavy and not very healthy since it is not made of breathable materials.

Air mattresses also started their adventure in the nineteenth century, and today they are mainly used in hospitals to prevent bedsores in long staying patients, or as makeshift beds for camping.

And then there are mattresses made of plant fibres, that are a combination of straw with other natural materials (heather, peat, hay, and aromatic herbs). They are much loved by naturalists, but are not considered part of the mattress category by national or international regulations. Their benefits are still to be tested and demonstrated.

Lastly the futon, or oriental mattress, is acquiring a significant world following today. It is a thin mattress made entirely of natural materials. It is flexible and can be rolled up, but does not guarantee good support for the spine.

So as we have seen, there is a huge range of mattresses available on the market today. And if you were thinking that choosing the right model is an arduous task (it really isn't, just try it), you will be pleased to know that maintenance is simple: in the first 90 days of a mattress's life, it should be turned (head to foot and top to bottom) at least twice a month to allow it to settle correctly.

Removable covers are washable. Do not use beaters to remove dust, as their impact is too violent. A low voltage vacuum cleaner is better for the job. Mattresses must never be soaked, nor steam cleaned: the insides would become humid, thus creating a friendly environment for dust mites, and possibly causing rotting. Finally, for reasons of hygiene, mattresses should be replaced every 5-7 years.

Just a few simple rules to ensure that your sleep is restful and restorative. And the benefits are outstanding!

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