



good night

Uncover the mystery of buying the right mattress with these tips from industry and sleep experts.

WWe all know the story of the *Three Little Bears* and the girl who tested each of the beds before finding the one that fit her "just right." But for many people, finding the perfect mattress is an enigma, even though as a nation, we spend about a third of our lives in our beds. "The mattress is quickly losing its tag as a commodity, and people are starting to appreciate how it can make a difference in how they sleep and feel the next day," says Pete Bills, senior director of Sleep Innovation at Select Comfort. "Besides

your house and car, buying a mattress is the third biggest purchase [decision] of your life."

As consumers have become aware of the importance of their mattresses, demand for better products has increased. And quality as well as price is on the rise. Today, there are myriad mattresses choices. We've profiled six companies to guide you to a product that fits your needs. But before you decide, read on to find out what you should look for when shopping for your new bed.

Determine whether you need a new mattress. First, strip off all the bedding and examine the sleep surface. Is there a hollowed-out spot where you normally sleep? Is the fabric covering worn? Did you add a foam pad or mattress cover a while back to soften the surface? Do you wake up with joints popping and limbs tingling? Have you gained or lost weight in the last few years (including through pregnancy)? If you said yes to any of these, you probably don't remember what a good night's sleep feels like, and you need a new mattress. "In most cases, people suffer with their mattresses for three or four years before they actually replace the things," says Adrian Jones, director of sales for Hypnos U.S. "We're a lazy society."

Do your homework. The mattress industry has undergone a significant shift in the past five years. Comfort and proper support are no longer mutually exclusive. The "firmer is better" mantra has given way to a new school of thought: "The industry's feeling is that you should buy something supple, not stiff," says Robin McRoskey Azevedo, president of McRoskey Airflex Mattress Co. "The mattress should conform to your shape."

Manufacturers offer options to do just that, from shock-absorbing viscoelastic to silk and cashmere filling to adjustable air chambers. The best way to find the mattress that suits you (and your partner, if you share a bed), is to do some of your own research for specific manufacturer information. Two independent industry sources are www.sleepproducts.org and www.bettersleep.org; they'll fill you in on innovations and the mattresses made by various companies.

Next, check out several manufacturers' Web sites to learn about their wares, then visit specialty sleep shops and showrooms to get a firsthand look at the most promising products.

Test the mattresses in person. Don't just run your hands across the quilted cushioning. Go to stores prepared for some serious relaxation -- or even a snooze. Wear loose, comfortable clothing, and bring a pillow or two from home. Plan to spend at least 15-20 minutes on each bed, and curl up as you normally do (not just flat on your back, unless that's how you sleep). One high-end manufacturer, Duxiana, offers a nap room in the shop so customers can test the mattresses. Others allow extensive in-home trials



Serta is known for its longevity, innovations, and popularity. The company has revolutionized the industry during its 74-year history by introducing the first tuftless innerspring mattress, which eliminated uncomfortable bulging buttons on the surface; encouraging consumers to replace their mattresses instead of handing them down (once a common practice); and offering foam-and-fiber Comfort Quilt surface cushioning in the 1990s, challenging the notion that firmer is better.

Price range: \$600-\$2,000 per set for the Perfect Sleeper collection; \$1,000-\$3,000 per set for the Perfect Night collection.

Interesting tidbits: Serta supplies mattresses for many American hotel chains, so chances are high that you've slept on a Serta product even if you don't own one. Additionally, all 2004 Serta lines feature the FireBlocker system, a unique blend of natural and synthetic fibers (without harmful chemicals) that isolate a fire's effect on the mattress, block its spread, and allow a person additional time to escape a bedroom fire.

Hypnos U.S. is known for sumptuous custom mattresses filled with cashmere, silk, and cotton felt. If they're good enough for Britain's royal family, Hypnos mattresses and box springs are probably good enough for you. This well-established British company was awarded royal warrants (prestigious product endorsements) from the late queen mother, Queen Elizabeth II, and Prince Charles. It custom-crafts each mattress by hand for customers all over the world. During the past two years, the company has steadily expanded throughout the United States.

Price range: \$4,000-\$12,000 per set.

Interesting tidbits: England's queen mother slept on her Hypnos mattress for 86 years -- well past its 25-year warranty. And after Russian president Vladimir Putin visited Buckingham Palace and slept on a Hypnos bed, he returned home and ordered his own.



Tempur-Pedic is known for its Swedish viscoelastic mattresses. The TEMPUR material balances your body, distributing weight and body temperature to take pressure off joints and keep you cool. "This material absorbs everything," spokeswoman Katie Tabeling says. "If you drop a ball on it, it doesn't bounce. It sits."

Price range: About \$1,200-\$5,100, plus shipping, per set.

Interesting tidbits: TEMPUR viscoelastic was first developed by NASA to absorb paralyzing G-forces during shuttle liftoff. Tempur-Pedic also offers pillows made of the same material.



McRoskey is known as a 105-year-old family business whose 34 employees handcraft every component of each mattress, from the inner springs' steel coils to the wood-frame box spring to the finished stitching.

Price range: \$1,700-\$3,700 per set.

Interesting tidbits: Well-regarded for its customer service, McRoskey records every customer's purchases, dating back to the 1920s, so if someone comes in wanting the exact mattress his parents bought in 1954, employees can look up the account and fulfill the order.



Select Comfort is known for its adjustable mattresses with firmness identified by a sleep number.

Price range: \$900-\$4,200 per set.

Interesting tidbits: Sleep Number beds will soon be available in all Radisson hotels in North America and the Caribbean so hotel guests can adjust the beds to suit their tastes. The company also makes custom-size beds: Kevin Garnett, a 6-foot-11-inch-tall forward for the Minnesota Timberwolves and 2003-04 MVP of the National Basketball Association, was tired of sleeping diagonally on beds, so he requested a custom-made 9-x-9-foot bed.

"He absolutely loves it" and has since become a company spokesperson," says Pete Bils, senior director of Sleep Innovation at Select Comfort. In fact, Garnett's request led to development of a new standard mattress size, the grand king, 80 x 96 inches -- 30 percent larger than a regular king size. (The company sells grand king sheets, mattress pads, and comforters to fit.)



Kingsdown is known for "quality and guts," marketing director Amber Mabe says. Premium viscose foams, antimicrobial products throughout, soft-as-a-baby's-blanket velours and knit fabrics, and handmade construction sets Kingsdown apart.

So does the new DormoDiagnostics program, an interactive computer technology that determines the best sleep system for each customer. After completing a questionnaire about age, height, sleep style, and lifestyle habits, a customer lies on a diagnostic bed for a two-minute assessment, during which computers take 18 measurements and calculate which of four Kingsdown sleep systems best suits the individual.

Price range: \$2,000 and up per set.

Interesting tidbits: One of the 100-year-old company's biggest markets is Japan. "They've gone from sleeping on hard futons to sleeping on Kingsdown beds," Mabe says.



And generous exchange policies (partly because, they say, your body requires a couple weeks to adjust to a new sleep surface).

Consider the costs. The Better Sleep Council recommends buying the biggest mattress you can afford that will fit comfortably in your room because research shows that the larger the surface area, the better sleep you'll get. Industry experts recommend box spring or foundation because they are designed to work together. "Buying a mattress without the box spring is like buying a new car with old shock absorbers on it," says Bob Malin, vice president of merchandising for Serta. "If you have a fixed budget, you should buy a cheaper set rather than a more expensive mattress only. You'll get better support."

10 Ten tips to help you sleep better

- **Create a restful place to sleep.** Sleep in a cool, dark room that is free from noises that may disturb your sleep.
- **Sleep on a comfortable, supportive mattress and foundation.** It's difficult to sleep on a bed that's too small, too soft, too hard, or too old.
- **Give yourself permission to go to bed.** As hard as it may be to put away your to-do list, make sleep a priority.
- **Unwind early in the evening.** Try to deal with worries and distractions several hours before bedtime.
- **Develop a sleep ritual.** Doing the same things each night just before bed signals your body to settle down for the night.
- **Keep regular hours.** Keep your biological clock in check by going to bed at about the same time each night and waking up close to the same time each morning -- even on weekends.
- **Exercise regularly.** Regular exercise can help relieve daily tension and stress -- but don't exercise too close to bedtime or you may have trouble falling asleep.
- **Cut down on stimulants.** Consuming stimulants, such as caffeine, in the evening can make it more difficult to fall asleep.
- **Don't smoke.** Smokers take longer to fall asleep, and they wake up more often during the night.
- **Reduce alcohol intake.** Drinking alcohol shortly before bedtime interrupts and fragments sleep.

SOURCE: The Better Sleep Council