

Beds

- ◆ Hard mattresses are not necessarily the best for bad backs
- ◆ You (and your sleeping partner) need to try a new mattress for at least 10 minutes before you buy. Look out for manufacturers who offer a trial period
- ◆ Always do the mattress test! See point 9 below

Points to consider

1. Before spending money always experiment first. A stiff board under a mattress can make up for a sagging base. A medium mattress on an old solid/slatted base will give the same amount of variable support as buying a firm mattress on a soft base.
2. Don't take too much notice of the description on the product (eg "orthopaedic"). There is no regulation of manufacturers' descriptions of their product. You have to find one that best fits your needs regarding your height, weight, age, sleeping position and back problem.
3. Your new bed needs to be high enough, so that you can get up and sit down with ease, and wide enough, if you or your sleep partner is restless. (Have you considered a zip together mattress?)
4. The mattress should be supportive enough to take the weight of your body without sagging, but firm enough for you to turn with ease (a really giving surface is hard to turn on). The heavier the person the deeper the mattress needs to be. A soft or sprung base for a heavier person usually means more sag.
5. Interior sprung mattresses are the most common form of mattress and can provide sufficient support and cushion the bony curves of the body. They come with a large variation in numbers of springs and prices; always choose as many springs as you can within your budget.
6. Memory foam was originally developed for astronauts and works by responding to temperature and weight to relieve and disperse pressure. You must ensure that you can turn with ease however, because lying in one position for too long can create stiffness. There are a number of manufactures that provide both mattresses and toppers. Foam mattresses often need less turning than other kinds, which can prevent back strain.
7. It is advisable to buy your mattress and base together. A solid base is good and offers support when sitting or getting off the bed. A good quality full sprung edge base is the most flexible and will absorb wear and tear well.
8. You may also need to consider other aids depending on your sleeping position and back problem, for example lumber rolls, mattress toppers, and shoulder pillows

9. A simple rule of thumb to test whether a bed has the right level of firmness for you is to lie down on your back and slide your hand between mattress and the small of your back. If there is a large gap the bed is probably too hard, if it is difficult to push your hand through it is probably too soft, and if your hand slides through but remains in contact with your back and the bed it is probably just right.
10. A bed needs to be tested for at least 10 minutes according to the Osteopathic Council and some manufacturers do a home trial that is worth looking out for.

Useful Websites

The Sleep Council www.sleepcouncil.org.uk

National Bed Federation www.bedfed.org.uk

Ergonomics Society www.ergonomics.org.uk

General Osteopathic Council www.osteopathy.org.uk