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Choosing the right Mattress

Some General Rules of thumb, individuals vary a lot. Try before you buy!

Lower back pain: Patients suffering with low back pain (LBP) most often prefer beds that are firmer. One study purported that hard beds should be the first choice for LBP sufferers, but if that did not help, then they should try waterbeds.⁷ The recommendation is not that they should sleep on a rock-hard bed, but rather, that they need support. A firmer bed prevents the low back from sinking deeply into the bed and irritating the facet joints. Higher-end luxury beds can provide plenty of support along with comfortable padding, while lower-end discounted beds can provide the firmness, but with less comfort.

Upper back and neck pain: Patients who are suffering from upper back and neck pain often prefer softer or plushier bedding. The plushier cushioning in the bed allows the head and thoracic area to sink into the bed to support the cervical area. A pillow-top mattress, or one with softer foams, padding and quilting, can be a good recommendation. There are also several types of pillows that can provide extra support for the neck.

Arthritis and fibromyalgia: Patients suffering with multiple painful joints often prefer bedding with cushioning that disperses the weight across the greatest body surface. Frequently, such patients also have spinal complaints. Balancing cushioning with proper support for the spine requires a higher-end mattress. Since fibromyalgia is related to stress levels, it also is important to review pre-sleep rituals with patients to help relax them before going to bed.

Stomach sleepers: Sleeping on the stomach in a soft bed can stress the thoracolumbar spine. The weight of the belly and pelvis also compress the bedding. To provide support to the stomach, pelvis and thoracolumbar areas, a firmer mattress is necessary.

Side-lying sleepers: An estimated 73 percent of the population sleeps on its side.⁸ Plush mattresses are often recommended to side-lying sleepers because they provide the best way to maintain the natural shape of the spine and the curves of the hips and shoulders while sleeping. Plush bedding will cradle the body and help disperse the weight of the body across the maximum surface area, instead of creating pressure points at the hips and shoulders. Special pillows also may be necessary to support the neck in a position parallel to the ground.

Seniors: Most seniors grew up sleeping on extremely stiff beds, because that was what manufacturers made at that time. Having slept on firm mattresses their entire lives, many prefer firmer bedding, even if their health conditions indicate that plushier bedding would be better. Some education may be necessary to convince an older person of the need to change mattresses.