

Do you wake up in the morning feeling rested and ready for the day ahead or do you rise with aches, pains and a fuzzy head from too little sleep? We spend up to a third of our lives in bed and, according to the Sleep Council – an independent organisation that raises awareness of sleep's impact on health and wellbeing – a comfortable and supportive bed is the foundation of a restorative night's slumber. Ensuring your mattress is doing its job is the first step to the best possible start to your day.

What types of mattress are there?

Lots, and quality varies depending on the price. A budget mattress will usually be made up of open coil or sprung units. This continuous spring design consists of a single length of wire knitted into a series of interwoven springs; the higher the spring count, the more comfortable it will be.

At the higher end sit pocket-sprung mattresses. These feature small metal springs, each sewn into their own "pocket" of fabric, making them individually responsive. More expensive designs will have up to 3,000 individual coils and include multiple layers of fillings including natural ingredients such as wool, cashmere, horsehair, silk or latex foam.

What is memory foam?

Originally developed in association with Nasa, memory foam is made up of tightly knitted viscoelastic cells that respond to your temperature and weight, cushioning you and relieving pressure on joints. Called memory foam because of its ability to regain its original shape and structure rather than remember the shape of your body, it's hypoallergenic, too.

Initial problems with the foam retaining heat have mostly been dealt with by combining several foam layers, gel-infusing the foam, adding charcoal to aid breathability and even combining with pocket springs to create a hybrid mattress that some say offers the best of both worlds.

What size do I need?

Available in standard UK single (90cm x 190cm), double (135cm x 190cm), king (150cm x 200cm), super-king (180cm x 200cm) and emperor (215cm x 200cm), there's a mattress to fit every base. Some manufacturers have also cottoned on to the fact that we're using bed bases in European sizes (from Ikea, for instance) and now produce non-standard continental sizes, too. If you already have a base, measure the flat, interior section to discover the size and buy accordingly.

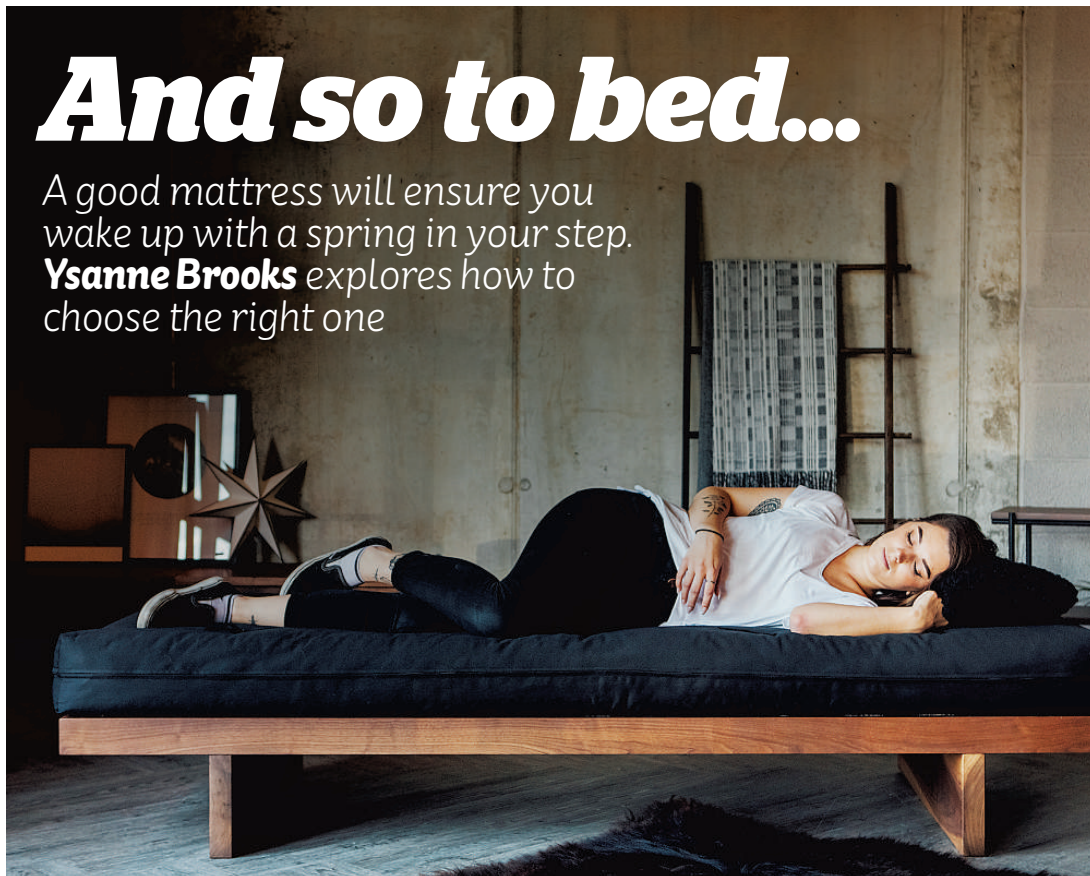
How firm should it be?

How heavy you are, the position in which you generally sleep and whether you're a restless or light sleeper will all dictate the firm-

More expensive designs will have up to 3,000 individual coils

And so to bed...

A good mattress will ensure you wake up with a spring in your step. **Ysanne Brooks** explores how to choose the right one



ness of the mattress you choose. Most now come in variations of firm, medium-firm, medium-soft and soft, although some memory foam mattresses have just one comfort level. As a general rule, light and side sleepers should choose something that's slightly softer while heavier back or front sleepers should go for the medium-firm or firm option.

Which type is best for back pain?

What's right for one person might not necessarily work for another,

depending on size, age and weight. Your choice of mattress will also depend on the type of back condition you have so it might be worth a trip to your doctor for some advice first.

Back sleepers need support for their lower spine to prevent too much pressure on this area, so a medium-firm mattress that has enough hardness to support but a level of softness to cushion for added comfort is a good choice. Keeping the spine aligned is key if you're a front sleeper, so a firmer mattress is better. Side sleeping

relaxes the spine and takes pressure off the back, making it the best position in which to sleep, and a softer or medium-firm mattress will allow the spine to rest in its most natural position. Memory foam or a memory foam-hybrid will help those with back pain as they contour and support your whole body.

What is a mattress topper?

An additional layer of comfort for your mattress, removable toppers are available in a range of materials and depths, from latex, for a

You need to pick a mattress that's right for you: Above: Kyoto Day-Bed, naturalbedcompany.co.uk

firmer feel, to cotton and duck down for softness and warmth. Some memory foam mattress suppliers offer foam toppers to provide an additional layer.

What is a mattress protector?

Many modern mattresses don't require turning so it's a good idea to top them with a removable protective layer that can be popped into the wash when necessary. Thinner than a topper, it's not there to provide extra comfort, although some do, it's more to help to preserve the life of a mattress and maintain freshness – particularly on children's beds, for instance.

Mattress care

The general consensus seems to be that a new mattress is advisable every eight to 10 years. There are ways to keep your mattress at its best for as long as possible, though. If your mattress requires flipping and rotating then make sure you do this fairly regularly to ensure springs don't get displaced or bunch in one position over time, or it doesn't wear in one place. Flip the mattress once every three months and turn it top to tail at the same time. It's important to keep your mattress clean, so try not to eat in bed. A regular vacuum will help to keep it dust- and mite-free. Adding a mattress protector is also a good preventative measure.

How I found my fairy-tale mattress

As I teenager, I slept on a sofa bed for three years and, as a student, a mattress on the floor. So to find myself, in my thirties, sleeping once again on a fold-out bed with Princess-and-the-Pea-like layers of foam mattresses was too depressing for words. Enough was enough.

I spent so much time researching "internet mattresses" (the groovy memory-foam beds that come in a box, like many of the ones in today's **buys**, right) that my Instagram feed showed two mattresses to every one post from a friend. I agonised, I

measured, I contemplated depth and potential sweatiness. I laid on display beds in retail parks and made decisions and then realised certain brands didn't do the dinky size I needed.

At an interiors event I went to for work, I squeaked with delight when I saw that almost every room, decorated by a different design company, had an internet mattress (Casper) in it. Ever the professional, by the end of the morning I had tried out each one.

When my Casper mattress arrived (£525 for a small double), it felt like Christmas. I unboxed it, unrolled it and set it on my bed base. Like the little bear's porridge, it's not too hot, nor too cold, but just right. My bed is now a cloud-like nest.

My advice? Seek out a mattress that makes you feel like Sleeping Beauty. **Rebecca Armstrong**

