

This leaflet is designed to help ease the strain of back pain with a comfortable and supportive bed. It won't cure an existing back problem and is no substitute for proper medical attention. However the medical profession generally agrees that a bed which offers the correct support is important to most back problems and can help prevent back problems from developing or worsening. An old bed or a second-hand bed, shaped to someone else's needs is almost certain to aggravate and contribute to back problems. It is important to ask yourself the following questions in order to establish whether or not your bed is providing the correct support.

Is it more than 8-10 years old?

Has the mattress gone floppy, uneven or lumpy?

Do you or your partner roll together unintentionally?

Do you wake up feeling stiff, or with back or neck pain

Firmness—There is no set standard of firmness for mattresses. The term '**orthopaedic**' has misled people into buying hard beds in the hope of finding relief. Far from easing back problems, a hard bed could make the condition more uncomfortable. On the other hand a bed that is too soft can inhibit ease of movement and

make the spine sag, stretching and straining the muscles that support it. In the end it is up to personal assessment of support needed, guided by factors such your weight, and build, your size and age, your preferred sleeping position. Use this simple test to assess the correct support. Lie down on your back and slide your hand, palm down, between the small of your back and the mattress.

Can you slide your hand through fairly easily—but without there being a large gap? Then the bed support is about right.

Is there a gap? Then the bed is probably too hard.

Is it a struggle to push your hand through? Then the bed is probably too soft for you.

Mattresses—There are a number of different types available and which one you will choose will be based entirely on personal preference.

Spring interior mattresses are the most common. These might be open coil, pocketed spring or continuous springing. They vary in degree of firmness from soft to rigid.

Foam mattresses can be either natural latex or polyurethane foam, in a wide range of densities, qualities and levels of firmness. You may also consider waterbeds or flotation beds.

Height Check—This can be easily overlooked when purchasing a new bed.

Can you get off and on the easily? Higher beds are easier to get into an out of if you have back problems.

Is it a comfortable height for making each morning and changing bedding?

Size Check—As well as the height of the bed, consider the width and length. If you do suffer with a back problem a squeezed and cramped nights sleep will not help.

Adjustable beds—An '**adjustable bed**' where you can raise and lower the head and foot ends, is useful to those who need to balance the requirements for more upright support to ease breathing or older problems and also to avoid back pain. They are also useful for those people who experience difficulty getting in and out of bed.

Shopping Tips—If you are thinking of buying a new bed, it is vital that you try out the new bed before buying it.

Take off any outdoor clothing and lie on each bed you test for as long as you can, in the position you normally sleep in.

Always try and take your sleeping partner

with you and, if your partner weighs a lot more than you or prefers a different degree of firmness, you may want to consider buying two single beds.

Bases—Again there are a number of options:

A solid or platform or a solid slatted base is the firmest—and the least expensive. It also offers good support for getting on and off it.

A firm edge with springs in the centre of a solid frame offers similar edge support and convenience.

A full spring edge base, being more flexible, will absorb wear and tear well.

It is not a good idea to put a new mattress on an old base. New mattresses will quite easily take on the faults of the old base. Take care when selecting a mattress and a base separately, if the mattress is not suitable for the base type, it could easily get damaged.

Are You Sleeping Comfortably?

The following suggestions on sleeping positions, getting in and out of bed, making beds etc. may help ease any back problems.

A good supportive pillow is important. The aim of the pillow is to support the neck rather than the head and ideally the neck vertebrae should be kept in a continued line with the vertebrae of the chest. Although there is no

best posture for sleeping, too many pillows may provide neck pain.

Some people find lying on their side with a pillow between the knees can considerably ease back pain.

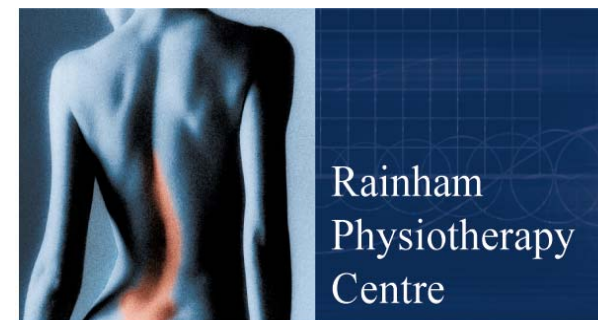
If you lie mostly on your back, you may find it most comfortable to place a pillow under the knees or to support your legs from the knees down with cushions.

It is also a good idea to change position from time to time while you are awake.

When in pain the easiest way to turn in bed is to bend your knees, bringing your heels up towards your buttocks and keeping your shoulders in line with your hips, let the knees fall to one side and use the weight of your legs to roll over.

Take care when getting in and out of bed. When getting in sit on the edge, lower your body onto the elbow and shoulder, draw up your knees until your feet are on the mattress, then roll your body over to face the ceiling. Reverse the procedure when getting out—and bend both knees.

When making the bed, ensure there is easy access to both sides and avoid stretching across the bed at any stage. Kneel down to tuck in sheets/blankets. The higher the bed the better.



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**A Bed Guide
For People
With Back
Problems**