



Osteopathy: Choosing a bed

Is your bed helping, or is it part of your back problem?

Top tips for back pain sufferers:

1. The majority of mattresses need to be turned regularly (between six weeks and three months). Do get someone to help you avoid the strain of turning your mattress. If you live on your own you may prefer one of the foam/latex mattresses that don't need turning.
2. The mattress should be supportive enough to take the weight of the body without sagging. If you are used to a soft bed, don't suddenly change to a very hard bed; the difference may prove difficult to adapt to. However, the mattress does need to be firm enough to allow for shifts of posture during the night. This is necessary to lessen fatigue and relieve the prolonged stress on soft tissues – it is not easy turning on a really 'giving' surface!
3. The mattress needs to be comfortable to lie on and soft enough, with sufficient 'give', to support and cushion the body's bony curves (for example like that provided by a 'pocket sprung' mattress). Don't be embarrassed to lie on the bed for twenty minutes or so in the shop – it's not as long as you'll spend on it each night!
4. In one GP study 85% of doctors believed that allergic disorders, such as asthma and eczema could be aggravated by sleeping on beds which harboured dust and mites. Hygiene and ventilation of the bed and covers are important; special protective covers may also help.
5. The mattress needs to allow for the easy evaporation of perspiration. The body loses between one and two pints of perspiration per night. The divan or slatted base allows for air circulation. If you are going to put a board under your mattress to improve support ensure it has holes for ventilation. The residue of perspiration will otherwise result in early rotting of the repeatedly 'damp' mattress fillings.
6. A good heavy mattress will need a strong base. It is best to buy the base and mattress together, but if you buy these items separately do seek advice from the sales representative that they would make a suitable combination and get this in writing as otherwise the guarantee on either the base or mattress may be invalidated by misuse. Remember you won't get an idea of how the bed will ultimately feel unless you are trying base and mattress together.
7. The bed itself should, of course, be soundly constructed and represent good value for money. Cost considerations are understandable but the lowest priced bed will not last as long.

8. The base may need to be dismantled if you are likely to move house often – some are much more easily dismantled than others.
9. A 'standard double' bed is 4 feet 6 inches wide but a 'standard single' bed is 3 feet! It is therefore evident that a large double makes more sense for two to sleep in – especially if one individual moves a lot in bed. A larger bed may also be longer too.
10. If you and your partner are of different weights consider a zip and link bed. Choose what's right for you – if you are of average weight and need a supportive mattress but your partner is heavier and requires a firmer one, it might be better to choose a bed with separate mattress types on either side.
11. Another option is a water bed. These are very much a matter of taste. Manufacturers claim that they support the body without distorting the spine and will last for many years without sagging. These beds apparently have no pressure point areas (so they are comfortable), they generally have the facility for internal heating and there is less likelihood of mites and dust. However, as with many things, waterbeds are popular with some people, but others find them very difficult to relax in – try one before you pay in full.

Remember, there is no absolute best choice of bed. Be satisfied it is right for you before you buy because it may be difficult to change it afterwards for purely comfort reasons. Also remember that the word 'orthopaedic' is really meaningless, though it generally implies 'firm'.

If you require further advice on a back problem seek advice from a local osteopath.

What is Osteopathy?

- Osteopathy recognises that much of the pain and disability we suffer stems from abnormalities in our body's structure and function.
- Osteopaths diagnose and treat problems with muscles, ligaments, nerves and joints to help the body's natural healing ability.
- Treatment involves gentle, manual techniques – easing pain, reducing swelling and improving mobility. Often, this involves manipulation which can result in an audible 'crack' which is simply the sound of gas bubbles popping in the fluid of the joints.
- Osteopathy does not involve the use of drugs or surgery.

Visiting an osteopath

On your first visit, and before examination begins, the osteopath will discuss and record your medical history in detail. You will then normally be asked to remove some of your clothing so that a series of observations and biomechanical assessments can be made.

The osteopath will then apply a highly developed sense of touch to identify points of weakness or excessive strain throughout the body. Further investigations may include an x-ray or blood test. This will allow a full diagnosis of the problem and will enable the osteopath to tailor a treatment plan to your needs.

Your osteopath should make you feel at ease and tell you what is happening throughout your consultation. You should ask questions if you have any concerns. If further medical treatment is needed the osteopath may contact your doctor, with your permission.

How much does osteopathy cost?

You do not need a referral from a GP to see an osteopath. The majority of osteopaths work in private practice, so you may choose to approach a practitioner directly and pay for treatment. Fees range from £25 to £50 and above for a single session, depending upon the location of the practice and experience of the osteopath. Typically between two and six treatment sessions are needed, though this varies according to the severity of the problem.

An increasing number of osteopaths work alongside GPs, so it may be possible for your doctor to refer you to an osteopath on the NHS. It may also be possible to claim for a course of osteopathy if you have private health insurance policy. Check with your insurance provider to confirm the available level of cover and to find out whether you require a referral from a GP or specialist. All insurance companies have help lines to explain your benefits and methods of claiming.

Osteopathy and patient protection

Patients consulting an osteopath have the same safeguards and rights as when consulting a doctor or dentist. Osteopathy is an established system of diagnosis and treatment, recognised by the British Medical Association as a distinct clinical discipline.

Under the Osteopaths Act of 1993, osteopathy was accorded statutory recognition, and the title "osteopath" protected by law. In the UK it is now a criminal offence to describe oneself as an osteopath unless registered with the General Osteopathic Council (GOsC).

The GOsC regulates, promotes and develops the profession, maintaining a Statutory Register of those entitled to practise. Practitioners on the Register meet the highest standards of safety and competency. They have provided proof of good health, good character and have professional indemnity insurance.

Osteopathic training is demanding and lengthy, and a recognised qualification is only available from osteopathic educational institutions accredited by the GOsC. Trainee osteopaths study anatomy, physiology, pathology, biomechanics and clinical methods during a four or five year honours degree programme. Such wide-ranging medical training gives osteopaths the skills to diagnose conditions when osteopathic treatment is not advisable, and the patient must be referred to a GP for further investigation.

Osteopaths are committed to a programme of continuing professional development.

You can obtain details of an osteopath's registration by telephoning the GOsC on **020 7357 6655**.

Finding an osteopath near you

To find an osteopath near you details are available in Thomson and Yellow Pages directories.

Alternatively contact the GOsC directly at:

Osteopathy House

176 Tower Bridge Road

London SE1 3LU

Tel: 020 7357 6655

Email: info@osteopathy.org.uk

www.osteopathy.org.uk

Further information

This leaflet is one of a series of information leaflets for the public. Please contact us for copies of the following:

- Osteopathy: An introduction to Osteopathy and the GOsC
- Osteopathy: Arthritis
- Osteopathy: Babies and children
- Osteopathy: Back Pain
- Osteopathy: Driving
- Osteopathy: Pain Relief
- Osteopathy: Pregnancy
- Osteopathy: Sports
- Osteopathy: Work Strain

For further information and lists of local practitioners please contact the Osteopathic Information Service, General Osteopathic Council, Osteopathy House, 176 Tower Bridge Road, London, SE1 3LU. Telephone number 0207 357 6655 or alternatively use our searchable database on www.osteopathy.org.uk