

Two in a Bed: Tips on Getting Comfy as a Couple

You and your mate are settled into bed for the night and you're just drifting off, when you get hit in the nose with an elbow. Or you're sleeping peacefully only to be rudely awakened by your snoring spouse. Then there's the partner who can't get to sleep without rearranging the bed, plumping the pillows and yanking covers. Or the one who can't sleep and announces her decision to read by flicking on the 100-watt lamp next to the bed.

These are just some of the hazards that couples encounter when climbing into the same bed. Even couples who are compatible during the day may find themselves at war at bedtime. Pay attention to these problems, because when the bed becomes a battleground, you may not be getting the sleep you need – and may find yourselves sniping at each other in the morning.

In many cases, the problems are strictly territorial, according to the Better Sleep Council. Most of us find that once the honeymoon is over, we need some sleeping space to ourselves if we're to get really comfortable. We each have a favorite sleeping position, and yours may not mesh with your mate's. Everyone changes positions some 40 to 60 times during the night, including about a dozen full body turns, which is bound to lead to the occasional body blow.

In case you haven't noticed, men and women are different. She sleeps lighter than he does, studies show, and is more likely to be awakened by his nightly tossings. He's usually heavier, so she can get more easily swamped. One good turn and she's over the edge.

One of the keys to solving territorial skirmishes is the selection of the right mattress. If you're sharing a queen-size set, you may want to consider buying a king-size. At 76 inches wide, a king will give you 16 more inches of sleeping space than a queen-size. Just be sure that it will fit comfortably in your bedroom.

If your bed has seen more than 5-7 years of nightly service, it probably isn't giving you and your partner the comfort and support you need for the best night's sleep. Don't wait until you're rolling into each other or waking up feeling stiff and achy. Give some serious consideration to buying a new mattress that offers the latest in comfort and support technology.

The best way to make sure that a new mattress set is right for both of you is to shop together. Couples often find that they have different needs and likes. His tastes may run to a harder mattress, but she may need a plusher surface to feel comfortable. Try several sets to make sure the balance between comfort and support is just right. And by lying down, you'll be able to decide if each of you has enough space to avoid those nighttime collisions.

Checklist for Comfy Couples

1. Make sure your mattress is right for the both of you. Your mattress set needs to be spacious enough for two active, adult bodies, supportive enough for the heaviest sleeper and comfortable enough to cradle you both to sleep.

2. Resolve daytime sleeping problems before going to bed. Don't wait until you're nose-to-nose at night to work things out. If you associate your bed with worrying or quarreling, you'll have trouble associating it with a good night's sleep.

3. Agree on a set of ground rules. Have an honest talk about your nighttime differences. Then work out a peace treaty that you can both live with. "Lights out by 11," might be one of the rules. If she wants to read in the middle of the night, she goes to the living room...or try out a high-intensity reading light that lets her see, but leaves him in the dark.

4. Arrange your sleeping environment together. In addition to a joint selection of your new mattress, couples need to consult on such factors as bedroom temperature (mid-60s is optimum for sleeping), fresh air or air conditioning, a little moonlight or total darkness.

And before you purchase blankets or pillows, find out what your partner prefers.

5. Don't let a serious sleep problem persist. If your mate has any symptoms of a sleep disorder – extreme snoring, teeth grinding and continuous leg jerks are a few – you may be the only one who's aware of it. Since a sleep disorder can rob you both of a good night's sleep, make sure it receives medical attention. Today, nearly all of these problems are treatable at local sleep disorders clinics.

For more information on buying a new mattress or on getting a good night's sleep, visit the Better Sleep Council's website at www.bettersleep.org.