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WHICH MATTRESS TO BUY?

A common misconception is that a firm mattress is ideal for spinal pain; in fact this misconception has been common for many years now. We believe it is possible that bedding manufacturers have taken this on board and have overly firmed up their product. Consequently a firm mattress nowadays can be, in our opinions, detrimental to those suffering spinal pain. We see it time and again in our clinic where people suffering spinal pain sleep on a firm mattress, or otherwise are sleeping on an ancient 'sagger'. The correct mattress (one rated *medium*), need not cost more than \$1000 and will make a BIG difference to your pain levels.

Springs need only to support the body mass. If your partner is much heavier than you are, then consider a separately sprung mattress so you won't roll inwards. Otherwise a conventionally sprung, and cheaper spring set up is fine.

Have a look at the following article in the well considered journal of "Lancet" which measures back pain in relation to the firmness of the mattress.

Effect of firmness of mattress on chronic non-specific low-back pain

Kovacs FM, Abraira V, Peña A, et al.

BACKGROUND: A firm mattress is commonly believed to be beneficial for low-back pain, although evidence supporting this recommendation is lacking. We assessed the effect of different firmnesses of mattresses on the clinical course of patients with chronic non-specific low-back pain.

METHODS: In a randomised, double-blind, controlled, multicentre trial, we assessed 313 adults who had chronic non-specific low-back pain, but no referred

pain, who complained of backache while lying in bed and on rising. Mattress firmness is rated on a scale developed by the European Committee for Standardisation. The Hs scale starts at 1·0 (firmest) and stops at 10·0 (softest). We randomly assigned participants firm mattresses (Hs=2·3) or medium-firm mattresses (Hs=5·6). We did clinical assessments at baseline and at 90 days. Primary endpoints were improvements in pain while lying in bed, pain on rising, and disability.

FINDINGS: At 90 days, patients with medium-firm mattresses had better outcomes for pain in bed, pain on rising, and disability than did patients with firm mattresses. Throughout the study period, patients with medium-firm mattresses also had less daytime low-back pain, pain while lying in bed, and pain on rising than did patients with firm mattresses.

INTERPRETATION: A mattress of medium firmness improves pain and disability among patients with chronic non-specific low-back pain.

Source: Lancet 2003; 362: 1599-604