

# **SLEEPING SOFTLY**

**by Jane B. Todaro**

**(This story was written in February 2005 and has not appeared elsewhere.)**

**For years the popular belief has been that firm mattresses are much better for you than soft, plush ones. Word was, with a firm mattress you'll wake up fully refreshed, ready and rarin' to go – no backache, no soreness, no pain.**

**But does that theory have real support, or is that simply pillow talk?**

**“There's not a whole lot of science out there to demonstrate the link,” according to Nancy Shark, Executive Director of the Better Sleep Council, the non-profit organization financed by the mattress industry. Shark says, “You need to get the mattress that meets your individual needs for comfort and support.”**

**“There's been actually very little research done on mattresses,” claims Richard Guyer, M.D., a spine surgeon and the co-founder and fellowship director of the Texas Back Institute. Guyer maintains, “A firm mattress, in general, is better for the back. But he is quick to add, “If you have a normal spine, and you really don't have any problem, then it doesn't make any difference.”**

**Clete Kushida, Ph.D., M.D., concurs. Kushida is an associate professor at Stanford University Medical Center and director of the Stanford University Center for Human Sleep Research. Unfortunately, there are not a lot of studies dealing with the effect of bed surfaces on sleep, and certainly no head-to-head trials comparing bed surfaces with each other,” states Kushida. He adds, “The selection of the mattress is really based on personal preference. What the person should do is spend a good deal of time testing out the mattress before he or she purchases it.”**

**Ergonomic studies done on comfort show no difference in sleep quality between firm and less firm mattresses. Alan Hedge, Ph.D., a professor of ergonomics at Cornell University, says, “It's almost like the Goldilocks thing – not too hard, not too soft.” Hedge explains that**

**much of that popular theory is simply based on practical considerations, claiming, “One of the reasons beds are getting firmer is that people are getting heavier.”**

**Although the innerspring mattress industry has not changed in decades, it continues to dominate the market. But the specialty bedding category is steadily gaining popularity. Most visible is Tempur-Pedic, founded in 1992 in Lexington, Ky., by CEO Bob Trussell. The non-patented Tempur material was originally developed by and for NASA. Swedish half-brothers Michael Magnusson and Dag Lambic converted it to a formula suitable for consumer use, which is the one used today.**

**What do people like about Tempur-Pedic mattresses? What Tempur-Pedic President Tom Bryant calls the “Wow” effect. “They get on it and say ‘Wow!’” The self-adjusting, pressure-relieving material TEMPUR molds to an individual’s body and fills the void in the lumbar area. Of sleepers on their Swedish Sleep System mattresses, Bryant says, “They toss and turn about 80 percent less during the night.” The Celebrity Bed model, with a pillowtop design, is Tempur-Pedic’s most luxurious offering. “It seems to be our fastest growing model now,” according to Bryant.**

**So go ahead, keep your soft, cushiony mattress if you like it. Because at the literal end of the day, the mattress that feels good to you is the one that’s best. Pleasant dreams.**

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