

SLEEP GOOD

FEEL GOOD



The Sleep Council

Bed BUYERS *Guide*



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Time for a new bed ¹

When a bed is no longer providing proper support and comfort, it affects the quality of our sleep. People are often unaware that their bed may be one of the reasons why they are not sleeping well.

Beds don't last forever – life span is affected by factors such as the quality, care, amount of use (e.g. reading, watching TV and sleeping each night versus occasional use of a spare bed). Changes in lifestyle (marriage, new home) and in our bodies (losing or gaining weight, ageing, etc) can also necessitate a change of bed.

It may be time for a new mattress if:

- You wake up with aches and pains, which wear off as the day progresses
- You are not sleeping as well as you did a year ago
- You enjoy better sleep somewhere other than your own bed
- Your mattress shows signs of visible wear and tear



A new bed may not be a wonder cure to all life's stresses and strains, but it certainly should help you get a better night's sleep, leaving you refreshed and ready to face the world.

There are literally thousands of beds from which to choose and there's no such thing as the perfect type of bed for a particular condition or situation (e.g. one ideal bed for a back pain sufferer). Although a good retailer – and this booklet – will arm you with lots of information to make the process simpler, only you can make the final, important decision – so take your time and make it wisely.

Fascinating Fact 1

Buying a new bed may give a better night's sleep than taking a sleeping pill! Two-year research by sleep expert Dr Chris Idzikowski found that those with uncomfortable beds slept on average one hour less each night than those with comfortable beds.

How to choose a new bed

Here are a few general points to think about before you go shopping for your new bed:

- **Type.** What sort of style do you prefer? What do you like or dislike about your current bed? Do you prefer a firmer or softer feel?
- **Price.** Always shop for the best value not the lowest price. Of course, there are some perfectly acceptable, lower priced beds available (far preferable to an unhygienic second hand bed shaped to someone else's body) but the better the construction, the better the support and comfort and the longer the bed will last.
- **Size.** Being disturbed by a sleeping partner is one of the most common complaints. With a larger bed you are less likely to disturb one another. You should be able to lie side by side, with your arms behind your head and your elbows out, without touching.

Your bed should also be 4-6in (10-15cm) longer than the tallest partner – anyone over 6ft (1.8m) tall should consider a bed longer than standard. Many manufacturers make beds up to 7ft square as a matter of course; others will make special sizes.

Also consider the bed's height – many contemporary styles are low, while those with storage drawers may be much higher.



Bigger is better

Fascinating Fact 2

Testing conducted by the Furniture Industry Research Association shows that bed characteristics can deteriorate by as much as 70% over 10 years



Too small

TYPICAL UK BED SIZES

NAME	IMPERIAL SIZE*	METRIC SIZE*
Small Single	2'6" x 6'3"	75 x 190 cm
Single	3' x 6'3"	90 x 190 cm
Small Double	4' x 6'3"	120 x 190 cm
Double	4'6" x 6'3"	135 x 190 cm
King	5' x 6'6"	150 x 200 cm
Super King	6' x 6'6"	180 x 200 cm

*N.B. Metric and imperial dimensions are not exact equivalents

- **Check dimensions.** Bed sizes are not standardised and even if they have the same name (eg King size) they may not be the same size – especially if the mattress and base are not from the same manufacturer.
- **Buy base and mattress together.** At the very least, make sure you try mattresses on a similar type of base. The two are engineered to work together and a change of base will affect the feel and performance of the mattress.

TOP TIP

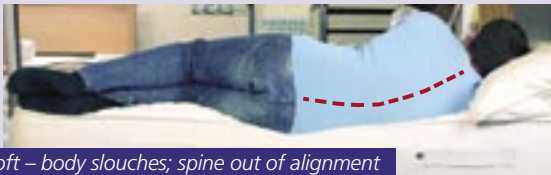
It can be a false economy to change only the mattress and keep the original base, especially if you are buying a divan. The old base could reduce the useful life of the new mattress as well as the support and comfort it can offer. It could also invalidate manufacturers' warranties or guarantees.

- **Access.** If you are worried about getting the bed upstairs, remember most divans have split bases; while many bedsteads are actually delivered in pieces for assembly in situ. To avoid problems with delivery, you should tell the retailer about potential access problems before you buy.
- **After sales service.** Can't decide between two or three equally suitable products? Think about the retailer's service – e.g. quick delivery; guarantee or warranty offered; free disposal of your old bed; special offers; or even just the chemistry between yourself and the salesperson.

Shopping for a new bed

There is no substitute for lying on mattresses when selecting the right one for you. You wouldn't buy a new car without taking it for a test drive first. Some retailers will exchange a bed if it proves not to be comfortable – but most won't, so it's very important to get it right first time.

- If the bed is for two, you need to shop together – otherwise there's a chance only one of you will be comfortable with your choice.
- Set aside enough time to do the job properly. You should try out several beds without time pressure. You need to be fresh, otherwise it will be difficult to appreciate the differences and they will all feel wonderful.
- Wear comfortable clothes, remove your coat and shoes and lie on the bed for quite a long time – at least 10 minutes, but don't be embarrassed if you want to make that half an hour! Relax. Adopt your normal sleeping position and lie on your side as well as your back.
- A comfortable bed is a bed offering the right support. You will need to make your own assessment, guided by factors such as weight, height, build and even preferred sleeping position. As a general rule, the heavier you are, the firmer the tension you will need. You don't necessarily need a hard bed if you have a bad back (see page 15 for more information).



Too soft – body slouches; spine out of alignment



Too hard – body not relaxed; tension and pressure points



Just right! – support and give follow body's profile, keeping spine aligned

- Most manufacturers will offer mattresses in firm, medium and soft options. Try different options to be sure which is best for you. Remember there is no industry-wide standard for tension so they will vary from one manufacturer to another.
- Your aim is to achieve good "posture" in bed. Too soft and your body will slouch, leading to back pain; too firm will cause discomfort at pressure points such as hips and shoulders.
- Ideally the mattress should mould to the shape of your body while remaining supportive. When you lie on your side your spine should be horizontal. You should be able to turn easily.
- For partners of widely differing size and weight (3 stones/ 18kgs or more), different mattresses may be required. Some manufacturers make double beds from two single mattresses zipped together, which can be of differing tension. Others can combine different degrees of firmness in one mattress.
- Comfort is very subjective. Some people like the sensation of sinking into a bed; others prefer to lie on the surface. Back sleepers may prefer a firmer option than people who sleep on their sides. There are lots of different "feels" around – you can choose what works best for you.

TOP TIP

Try this test to check for correct support. While lying on your back, slide the flat of your hand into the hollow of your back. If your hand slides in very easily or there's a gap, the bed is too firm (leading to pressure on your hips and shoulders). If it's really difficult to slide your hand in at all and you feel as if you are sinking into the mattress, then the bed is probably too soft for you.



Fascinating Fact 3

80% of bed shoppers spend less than two minutes trying out beds on which they are likely to be spending around 3,000 hours – over 120 full days – in just one year!

Types of mattress

Mattresses may look broadly similar, but the differences within are vast. This booklet can give only a brief guide to some of the main options.

FROM THE OUTSIDE

The first thing you'll notice about a mattress is its cover – known in the trade as ticking. Manufacturers spend a lot of time choosing attractive colours and designs so their mattresses will look good – but remember that 99% of the time it will be covered up with bed clothes!

The ticking is not just there for its good looks, it also needs to be tough and tear resistant. Better quality cloths are woven or knitted in high quality viscose or cotton yarns. Cheaper cloths in polyester or polypropylene are often printed. At the budget end of the market are bonded or stitchbond fabrics and some cheaper knits.

Ticking with special qualities is now also increasingly being used by mattress manufacturers. Some of the options include anti-dust mite/anti allergy, anti-bacterial, anti-microbial, anti-static, breathable, water resistant, stain resistant, highly absorbent, naturally fire retardant etc. There are even some infused with aromatherapy oils – quite a choice!

QUILTING OR TUFTING

Most mattresses are finished by either quilting or tufting. Quilting is a decorative effect attaching the outer fabric to the surface fillings; these mattresses

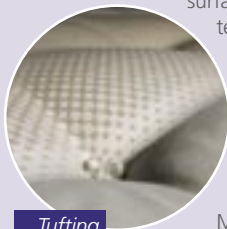
tend to have a smoother, flatter surface. Tufting

– where tapes are passed right through the mattress at regular intervals and secured each side by tags or washers – prevents loose fillings from being dislodged.

Mattress sides are also quilted – some higher quality mattresses are hand side stitched to keep the mattress in better shape for longer.



Quilting



Tufting



Hand side stitching

INSIDE A MATTRESS

There are essentially two main types of mattress construction – those with and those without springs.

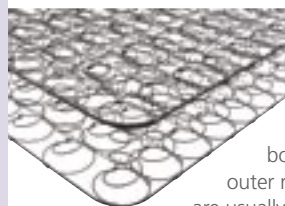
Spring interior mattresses

The majority of mattresses in the UK have spring interiors, which provide the 'core' support. Changing the spring construction, thickness (gauge) of the wire, the number of coils, height of each spring and the quantity alters the tension, feel and weight distribution properties of each mattress.

Spring interior mattresses can be 'zoned' – across the middle to give extra support for heavier hips and shoulders; half and half, to provide different tensions on each side of the bed; or round the edge of the mattress to give it extra rigidity.

Different tensions can be achieved within the same mattress. Some units also allow the user to adjust the mattress tension themselves.

THERE ARE THREE MAIN TYPES OF SPRING INTERIORS:

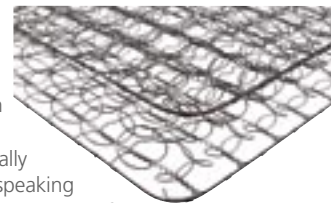


Open coil or open sprung

The most widely used option, also known as the Bonnell spring. Springs are arranged in rows and connected to one another, top and bottom, by a spiral helical wire with an outer rod strengthening the perimeter. There are usually 325 coils in a 5ft/150cm size – but some mattresses may have more. They come in a choice of tensions, starting from a very firm 12.5 gauge wire. Priced from budget to mid range.

Continuous spring

The continuous spring unit is made from a single length of wire 'knitted' into a series of interwoven springs which usually run up and down the bed and are linked vertically rather than horizontally. Generally speaking the gauge of wires used is softer and the size of the 'coils' smaller than open coil, giving a higher spring count and a more responsive feel. Generally priced in the mid market.



Pocket spring

Pocket springs are small, softer springs housed in individual fabric pockets, allowing them to work independently of one another, profiling to the body shape to prevent pressure points. Independent support means that there is little or no transmission of movement from one sleeping partner to another.

Spring counts typically vary from 600-800 up to 2,500 but can go up to 3 or even 4,000. Like other types they are made in a range of tensions. Higher quality mattresses are often hand side stitched to increase their life expectancy; quilted borders often look similar but do not provide the same additional life.

Pocket springs are generally more expensive than other types of unit and are used mainly in higher quality products.

FILLINGS

Interior sprung mattresses use a wide variety of fillings to create different properties and comfort options, as well as affecting price. Fillings are chosen for their resilience, durability, flexibility and ability to absorb body moisture. In cheaper mattresses, fillings usually come in compact pads; in better quality models, layers of loose fillings in greater volumes are often preferred.

Different fillings have specific functions:

- **Cotton** – often used near the surface for its soft feel and its ability to breathe and to absorb moisture.
- **Wool** – naturally resilient fibre, creating a luxurious feel with good fire retardancy properties, it is also breathable.
- **Foam** – different types of foam are used for their cushioning effect. They include latex, polyurethane and visco-elastic. Explanations of these different types of foam can be found on page 9.
- **Polyester** – a synthetic material with good recovery properties.
- **Hair** – highly resilient fibre, often described as “nature’s spring”. Available in pads or loose for high luxury.
- **Coir fibre** pads made from coconut fibre are generally used next to the spring to insulate and prevent the spring being felt or penetrating. Alternatives include compressed wool or synthetic pads.
- **Silk, cashmere, mohair** and other fine, natural fibres are also used for additional luxury.



Remember that mattress fillings will settle and compress over the first few months of use. This is normal and what makes your mattress unique to your body shape. This may be more pronounced in more expensive mattresses with more fillings. Turning regularly will help even out this settlement.

NON-SPRUNG MATTRESSES

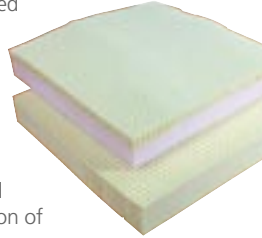
There are three main types: foam, flotation and futons.

Foam

Most foam mattresses are made from layers of different densities of foam. By varying their density and depth, it's possible to achieve different levels of comfort and support. They are particularly suitable for use with slatted bases and adjustable beds.

There are three main types of foam in use:

- **Latex** – a premium quality material derived from the sap of the rubber tree. It has a distinctive, resilient feel, is very durable and has anti-microbial properties that offer benefits to many allergy sufferers. Latex foam has natural elasticity and recovers its shape immediately when pressure is removed. It also has very good point elasticity resulting in even distribution of pressure for independent support.
- **Visco elastic** – a relatively new type of polyurethane foam (also commonly known as memory foam). With a unique feel, it slowly responds to body temperature and weight, taking the shape of the user – and slowly recovers its original shape when the heat and pressure is removed. It has good pressure relieving properties and is available in a variety of qualities and densities.
- **Polyurethane** – a synthetic, petroleum based foam with performance and price varying according to density and quality. It is widely used and very versatile.



Flotation beds

A water filled vinyl mattress is supported by a bed frame or can look like an ordinary mattress (the vinyl bag is surrounded by a foam frame inside the cover). Support is determined by the amount of water used and the level of motion can also be varied. Waterbeds are known for their pressure free support and are also good for allergy sufferers. Variable temperature heaters keep the bed warm and cosy. More detailed information can be obtained from the British Waterbed Association (see back page for contact details).

Futons

Originally from Japan, futons are usually made from layers of cotton or fibre wadding, which moulds itself to the shape of the body. In Japan they are used on the floor with a mat underneath and rolled away at night. In the UK, they are more often sold as budget priced sofa beds with slatted convertible frames.

Types of base

Most mattresses are used in combination with one of various choices of bed base, such as divans, bedsteads, adjustable beds and bunk beds. Remember to ensure that mattress and base are suitable for use together, especially if you are buying them separately.

1. DIVANS

The divan base is still the UK's most popular option. Essentially it's an upholstered box, fitted with castors for mobility or on legs to create space beneath. Deep divans are often fitted with useful storage drawers.

There are four main types of divan:

- Sprung edge divans feature a complete open coil or pocket spring unit mounted on a frame. Considered the most luxurious option, they provide even support across the whole mattress and act like a giant shock absorber, increasing the mattress's durability.



Sprung edge divan



Solid or platform top divan

- Solid or platform top divans have a rigid, non-sprung top panel, often made from hardboard. Beds with these bases are generally firmer, as well as cheaper than beds with sprung bases.
- Firm edge divans generally feature a smaller number of larger, heavy duty springs within a rigid, wooden sided frame.



Firm edge divan

- Flexible slatted divans use laminated soft woods mounted in a frame creating a modest level of springiness from their bowed shape. The tension of some slats can be adjusted to suit individual requirements (see page 12 for a picture of flexible slats).



Drawer storage

Storage

Under-bed storage can be useful if space in your home is at a premium. Storage need not affect the comfort or quality of the bed – but it does cost a little more. Underbed storage options in divan bases include:

- Drawers are located in one or both sides and/or the foot end. Smaller drawers in the top half of the bed allow for bedside tables.
- Access to the interior space via sliding doors on one side or both sides and/or the foot end – mostly on budget models.
- Ottoman style divans have a shallow platform top, (usually unsprung) hinged to the rest of the base, which, when lifted, gives access to almost all the underbed area. Hydraulic or tension springs make lifting and replacing safe and easy, even with a heavy mattress on top.



Slider storage



Ottoman storage

Fascinating Fact 4

Look for the blue and white FR label. All beds sold in the UK should meet fire safety regulations introduced in 1988, which require all foams to be combustion modified and the composite of springs, fillings and cover in each mattress and base to be cigarette and match flame resistant. These precautions have saved hundreds of lives. Beware some imported products, which do not always meet the standards required, even though they may be labelled correctly.



2. BEDSTEADS

Bedsteads have seen a remarkable revival in popularity in recent years and a vast array of styles is available in wood, metal, plastics, upholstered or any combination of these.



To support the mattress, the most common system is wooden slats – either rigid (with no give) or flexible, (see page 10 for fuller explanation). Others systems include flexible or rigid wire mesh. The space between slats on most, cheaper, rigid bases is usually wider than on flexible slatted models but it is advisable to ensure the gap



Rigid slats

is not more than 9-10cm, (approx 3in). Wear and tear on a mattress will be greater the wider the gaps. Most manufacturers make their own recommendations for slat spacing to suit their own mattresses, so check these before buying as they do vary. It is also possible to have a fully sprung bed base (with the same benefits as a divan) inside. A number of manufacturers make these to order.

As many bedsteads are imported or antique they may not conform to current UK standard sizes, so take care to ensure your mattress and bedstead are the same size!



Flexible sprung slats

Fascinating Fact 5

We lose more than a quarter of a litre of body moisture each night and shed almost half a kilo of skin scales in a year. This unhygienic environment is a haven for dust mites, whose droppings are known to aggravate asthma and eczema symptoms. Never accept a second hand bed and never hand one down to anyone else.



3. ADJUSTABLE BASES

Adjustable beds are becoming increasingly popular as the bedroom becomes a multi-functional space. As well as reading or having breakfast in bed, people now watch TV from their beds and even work on their laptops. Of course, adjustable beds still offer many benefits for a range of medical complaints requiring a raised sleeping position or raised legs or aid getting in and out of bed.

Styling choices range from a traditional divan look right through to contemporary bedstead designs. Some even incorporate massage units as an optional extra.

Available as single beds or as doubles with individually adjustable halves, these beds either feature flexible laminated slats or fully sprung upholstered sections. Some models have five or more individually adjusting sections – for neck, head, upper body, legs and feet; other models might only adjust the head and feet; or even just the upper body. Some models are designed to slide backwards as the head end comes up, thus keeping you in more convenient contact with your bedside table. Others fit side tables which can be moved along side rails.

Mattresses are specially made for adjustable beds so ideally the base and mattress should be bought together. It's a good idea to make sure that any electrical parts are separately guaranteed and fully compatible with UK systems.

4. BUNK BEDS

Bunk beds and cabin beds are a popular option for parents and children. They are fun as well as practical and space-saving. Our **Good Night Guide for Children** contains more information about bunk beds and sleep tips for youngsters. Visit www.sleepcouncil.com for more information.

Pillows & toppers



PILLOWS

When people complain of neck and shoulder pain, their choice of pillows is often the culprit. There is a wide selection available – goosedown, duckdown, feather, fibre filled, and visco-elastic, latex or polyurethane foam – and any number of combinations of these.

Pillows also come in different shapes and sizes, including ones which are pre-shaped to support the head and neck (often described as orthopaedic pillows). Once again the choice is subjective – whatever works for you.

A good pillow should hold your head in the correct alignment – that is, in the same relation to your shoulders and spine as if you were standing upright with the correct posture. The pillows should be tucked well into the neck and shoulder to support the head fully.

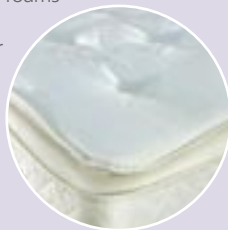
The thickness and number of pillows required depends on your body shape and your preferred sleeping position. You will need a thicker pillow (or two thinner ones) if you sleep on your side than if you sleep on your back. Sleeping on your front with your neck twisted is not recommended.

It is a good idea to invest in quality pillows and replace them at least every two or three years to maintain a healthy sleeping environment. When they have lost their 'loft' (height) and become lumpy, discoloured or mis-shapen they should be replaced. An old, unwashed pillow could also contain as much as 10% of its weight in skin scales, mould, dead and living dust mites and their allergen laden droppings!

OVERLAYS AND TOPPERS

Overlays and toppers are mostly used to soften the feel of a mattress, by adding extra layers of cushioning. Generally non-sprung, they may be made of a variety of materials – polyester fibre, latex, visco-elastic or other foams or even feathers. The choice is entirely subjective. Toppers are not a substitute for correct support – you'll need a mattress of the right tension. *Nor are they a substitute for replacing an old, worn out bed* – any impression of improved comfort will probably be short-lived.

Some modern mattresses styles include a fixed topper – often on styles which have been designed to eliminate the need for turning.



Your questions answered

What sort of bed should I choose if I have a bad back?

For a long time, it was believed that a hard bed was good for a bad back. Recent research confirms this is not necessarily the case – and could in fact cause more damage. A supportive and comfortable mattress is the best option – it doesn't matter what type of construction it is. Any reference to beds being orthopaedic – or similar medical sounding terms – does not mean that the bed has been professionally assessed or recommended. It is a term loosely used by manufacturers to refer to extra firm models in their range.

What sort of bed is best for sufferers from asthma or other types of allergic problem?

Almost all beds will, in time, attract house dust mites, whose droppings are highly allergenic. Regular cleaning, airing and the use of protective covers will reduce the effect. Some manufacturers are now using anti-dust mite treated fabrics for tickings. Always check details of construction and materials if you suffer from any other allergies. Manufacturers will be able to supply you with details.

Why are two similar mattresses so widely different in price?

Chances are they are not as similar as they seem. They might both claim to be predominantly of the same construction – but further investigation will probably reveal different material qualities, densities, amounts, etc. If you want to comparative shop you will need quite a lot of detail to make sure you are comparing like with like.

What should I pay for a good mattress?

Prices for beds range from well under £100 to several thousands. As a general rule you get what you pay for. Remember that every £100 you spend on a new bed represents an investment of just 3p a night (assuming a lifespan of 10 years). A bargain bed is no bargain if you don't sleep well in it.

Which is better – tufted or quilted?

Better quality tufts are well protected by wool or felt pompoms but some more sensitive people may be more aware of them than others. A good mattress protector can help. Otherwise, choose a quilted style instead.

Will I notice any difference between rigid and flexible slats?

Not only are they likely to feel different – rigid slats will give a bed a firmer feel – but they will affect the durability of the mattress. Rigid slats have no give and work against the mattress, leaving it to do all the work; sprung slats work with the mattress and will prolong its life and improve comfort levels.

I have been told to turn my mattress regularly. Why is this necessary?

On better quality mattresses, particularly with lots of natural fillings, body indentations are a normal characteristic of a mattress working as intended, allowing the springs to move individually while the fillings cradle your body. Regular turning will help the fillings settle and compact down more evenly – although there will still be some visible signs of the mattress settling to the contours of your body.



Follow the manufacturer's instructions, but generally it's a good idea to turn them from end to end and side to side every week for the first few months and thereafter about every three months. You should rotate a non-turn mattress.

If you are going to find it difficult to turn you should ask your retailer to show you mattress options which do not need turning: these are now available in both sprung and non-sprung constructions.

* Handles are intended to help position the mattress correctly on the base. Handles are not designed to carry the full weight of a mattress.

What is the difference between non-turn and no need to turn mattresses?

Non-turn mattresses are designed as one-sided mattresses and can only be used on that one side. Rotation is normally recommended to even out wear and tear. No need to turn mattresses can be used either way – but it is not necessary to turn them as regularly as other mattresses (although occasional turning is usually suggested).

Is bed linen freely available for bigger beds?

Most department stores stock linen for beds up to 180cm (6') wide. For other sizes there are companies who can make to order.

My mattress is not the same size as the base

There could be two reasons for this. You may not have bought the same size mattress as base. There are so many different sizes on the market these days it is important to check actual dimensions, in the same scale (metric or imperial), to be sure of a size match. Don't go by names alone – one shop's king size may not be the same as another's!

The other reason might be because of the construction. In transit or storage, mattress springs can sometimes nestle into each other temporarily reducing the length or width. During use, the mattress should recover its original dimension. The effect is likely to be more pronounced if the spring unit does not have a perimeter frame or the mattress is not fully hand side stitched – ideally a mattress should have one or the other feature to ensure it keeps its shape.

Are foam mattresses hot?

Mattresses don't create the heat and people can get hot on beds of all constructions but foam is a good insulator and the higher the density (i.e. the better the quality) the greater the potential heat retention. If you are the sort of person who gets hot in bed (and remember that age, health and medications can all affect your body's heat control mechanisms), look for foam with an open cell construction which will breathe more easily; make sure the mattress is well ventilated; and use cotton sheets, duvets with lower tog ratings etc. Look out, too, for the new generation of breathable ticking fabrics, and other ways of improving air circulation or introducing the concept of climate control into beds, which are now appearing on the market.

Useful contacts

ALLERGY UK

3 White Oak Square
London Road
Swanley
Kent
BR8 7AG

Allergy Helpline:
01322 619898
(from 9am to 5pm weekdays)
www.allergyuk.org
Email: info@allergyuk.org

BACKCARE

The Charity for Healthier Backs

16 Elmtree Road
Teddington
Middlesex
TW11 8ST

Helpline: 0870 950 0275
www.backcare.org.uk
Email: info@backcare.org.uk

BRITISH WATERBED ASSOCIATION

Tel: 0870 603 0202
www.waterbed.org
Email: enquiries@waterbed.org

CHARTERED SOCIETY OF PHYSIOTHERAPY

14 Bedford Row
London WC1R 4ED
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Email: enquiries@csp.org.uk

NATIONAL BED FEDERATION

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Victoria Street
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Somerset
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