

I Slept on 100 Mattresses

Staying in bed is a particularly attractive idea right now. But what kind? Pillow top or memory foam, latex, or organic? A comprehensive report.

By Sarah Bernard Published Feb 8, 2009

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firm,

From top to bottom: Nations Pride Mirage Eurotop, Tempurpedic Rhapsody, Simmons Beautyrest World Class Shawnee Super Pillow Top, Sealy Verdi Square Plush Euro Pillow top, and Simmons Beautyrest Classic Badgro Luxury Firm; available at 1800mattress.com. Mattresses: Courtesy of 1800mattress.com. Sheep: Courtesy of Sweet William.

(Photo: Horacio Salinas. Mattresses: Courtesy of 1800mattress.com. Sheep: Courtesy of Sweet William.)

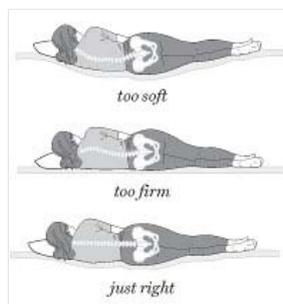
Flush, or soft feel? “Firm,” I said to the 1-800-Mattress guide as I lay on a Simmons Beautyrest. “Thought so,” he said. “New Yorkers like firm. Soft only sells in the suburbs.” That was the simplest thing I had to consider in my journey through modern bed-land. A lot has changed since the days when a bed was just some springs buttressing iridescent quilted polyester.

Mattresses of the moment are made of foam, latex, and sometimes coils in a mind-numbing array of combinations. The original foam is Tempur-pedic, the solid-memory foam developed by nasa and made famous by its infomercial; now there are legions. Tempur-pedic is one of the firmest beds you can buy and a best seller in New York. (Note to shoppers: This time of year, as white sales abound, [Macy's](#) lists a California King Rhapsody mattress set at \$3,799.) Converts like that unshakable feeling—one person can get up without the other inhabitant feeling the weight shift (it's called “motion separation” in the mattress business). Memory foam is also hypoallergenic, since dust mites can't live in it. But most of the foam beds I tested felt like warm quicksand, and the way they slowly rose up after I rolled off was slightly creepy. My favorite of the lot was from the Italian company Magniflex, whose “geoethic” line of beds have layers of plant-based memory foam (\$1,399 to \$5,399 for a queen). Magniflex cuts channels into their foam so air circulates. As I reclined my way through the Soho showroom (59 Crosby St., nr. Spring St.; 646-330-5483), I felt supported but not swallowed. And the delivery is smart; the mattress arrives rolled up a like a rug and vacuum-packed, which makes it a lot easier to lug up to a sixth-floor walk-up.

Then there's latex, which can be natural (made from rubber) or synthetic. It has bounce, so it feels closer to a traditional coil mattress, and manufacturers often layer various densities to “build” a bed—firm on the bottom, soft on top, and so forth. The rule of thumb here is the more natural latex involved, the higher the price. A mid-priced queen like the Stearns and Foster Julep, which has a puffy “Euro” pillow top, costs \$1,799 (Sleepy's, 157 E. 57th St., nr. Third Ave.; 212-421-3090). I found Ikea's \$899 queen-size natural latex quite satisfactory and—in this time of gargantuan, 21-inch-deep pillow-top giants—appealingly slim. (Ikea Brooklyn, 1 Beard St., nr. Otsego St., Red Hook; 718-246-4532).

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Illustrations by Kagan Mcleod

Hybrid beds made up the majority of the mattresses I tried. By and large, they felt exactly the same—an inch more latex here, a firm pillow top on a soft mattress or vice versa. Some even had a core of inner springs, each nestled into their own fabric pockets. I sunk happily into the Empress Exceptionale by Simmons at [1-800-Mattress](#) (\$3,499 for a queen, 369 W. 34th St., nr. Ninth Ave.; 212-239-0127), made with springs covered in latex plus memory foam and a pillow top. But it is so enormous, I can't imagine getting it into my New York apartment. Which is one of the problems with beds today. Some salespeople I spoke with reported a supersize backlash. 1-800-Mattress just introduced a house brand of shallower, cheaper mattresses with old-fashioned coils (\$599 for a queen Classic Gem). They're also two-sided,

which many mattresses aren't anymore, meaning they can be flipped periodically, thus lengthening their life span. I admired the thriftiness, but after trying all the pillow tops, the throwbacks felt too springy.

If I were going to replace my ten-year-old embodiment of old technology, I'd buy the David from OrganicPedic by OMI at [ABC Carpet & Home](#)'s organic emporium (\$3,395 for a queen, 888 Broadway, at 19th St.; 212-473-3000). Three layers of pure organic latex, customizable to your preference: firm, soft, medium. And the cotton cover is removable, so if the top latex layer seems saggy after a couple of years, you can just replace it for \$850 instead of buying an entirely new mattress. That's long-term thinking.

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