

## Coping With Couples' Different Sleep Needs

**If you're not sleeping well with your bed partner, you are not alone. But it doesn't have to be long-term problem. These tips should help.**

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WebMD Feature

Ah, sweet sleep for our addled brains. If only love would conquer all -- including sleep problems.

Couples spend nearly one-third of their lives sleeping together, or at least trying to. With different sleep needs, preferences, and problems, it can be as much work trying to get a good night's sleep together as it is getting through our waking hours. And a poor night's rest bodes ill for happy faces in the morning and throughout the day.

If you're not sleeping well with your bed partner, you are not alone. It's a big problem. A National Sleep Foundation Survey found:

- About 12% of married couples sleep alone.
- Sleep is related to marital satisfaction. Those with lower marital satisfaction are more likely than their counterparts to report symptoms of insomnia, daytime sleepiness, and they're getting less sleep than they did five years ago.
- Add children to the mix and you lose even more sleep and experience more symptoms of daytime sleepiness. More than 12% of married adults with children report typically sleeping with a child; a vast majority of these adults (81%) report having a sleep problem.
- More than one-third of adults report snoring a few times per week. If snoring resonates in your bed, it may send shock waves through your relationship and your bed partner out the door. It may also be a symptom of [sleep apnea](#), a serious disorder in which breathing stops repeatedly during sleep. Sleep apnea has been associated with decreased libido and sexual activity.

So, what to do? You say it's too hot, I say it's too cold; you want the left side and so do I; you like a firm mattress, but I like a softer one. And then there's cover stealing, [sleep talking](#), the pet in the bed, squeaky floors, too much light, too much noise. The list goes on.

### Short-Term Fixes

**Silence is golden.** Even the faintest of sounds, like a car going by or the air conditioner turning on or off, can disturb your sleep. Try some of these sound barriers:

- Earplugs. Consider using earplugs to quiet any snoring or other noises that go bump in the night. Think about trying some plugs even if you don't think noises wake you at night. You may be surprised at how much better you sleep.
- Headphones for the TV or music player. If your partner is ready for bed and you feel like listening to TV or some music, try some earphones. Newer models can fit in your pillowcase.
- Alarm clocks. If you and your partner wake at different times, consider something like a vibrating alarm clock that fits in your pillowcase so it doesn't disturb your partner.
- [Decongestants](#). If congestion contributes to snoring, see if taking a decongestant provides any relief.

**Make a pillow barrier.** A wall of pillows can help dampen sound and movement from your partner.

**Stagger bedtimes.** If your bed partner prevents you from getting to sleep, try going to sleep first, then have your partner join you after you have fallen into a deep sleep.

**Find a great pillow and replace it regularly.** Everyone loves a great pillow. So make it a point to find one that is just right for you. And replace it regularly. People tend to wait too long before replacing pillows. Don't wait until it is flat as a pancake.

**Get a great bed -- or two.** Interestingly, about half of all married couples would now choose a mattress as their first purchase. Getting that king- or queen-sized bed that is perfect for both of you may be difficult. It will also set you back some cash, but it's worth it. Remember, you are spending about one-third of your lives together on it, and it should last years.

You can customize your side of the bed by getting a mattress pad just for your side. Also, some of the newer beds are constructed in a way that dampens any movements of your partner so that he or she doesn't wake you by tossing and turning or getting out of bed. You may also consider getting two twins, pushing them together, and connecting them with a pad that rests along the junction of the two. This provides truly "independent suspension."

**Plan for the kids.** If your children wake you up at night, make a plan so that at least one of you is not disturbed and gets some sleep.

**Darkness is very important.** Even the light from an alarm clock can disturb your sleep. So make your room as dark as possible. Cover your windows thoroughly. Consider these products:

- Eye covers. Some eye covers have a soothing lavender scent.
- Book light. A variety of book lights let you finish that last page while your partner snoozes peacefully.

**Fido and Fluffy may have to go.** Sure, you love them, but from [allergies](#) to noises to their movements, pets on your bed or in the room may disturb your sleep.

**Restrict fluids.** If you usually wake your partner (or vice versa) as you get out of bed to use the bathroom, try not to drink anything in the few hours before bedtime.

**Consider sleep aids.** If you or your partner has sleep problems, see a specialist and consider the appropriate use of sleep [medications](#).

**Have or don't have sex.** Sex generally sedates men while it arouses women. So use this judiciously.

**Go to another room.** While not recommended as a long-term solution, getting a good night's sleep is vital to functioning properly. So consider sleeping separately during a sleep crisis.

### Long-Term Solutions

**Make getting a good night's sleep a top priority.** There is little likelihood that your sleep will improve without recognizing it as an issue that is vitally important for your health and relationship. The consequences are large indeed. So make it a top priority, just like work, finances, education, health care, etc.

**Communicate.** As the saying goes, "Men are from Mars and women are from Venus." Discussing sleep issues together can be difficult and emotional. Although it might be easier said than done, it is critical to communicate well and often.

**Make a plan.** Identify the issues and specific problems that are important to each of you. There may be more than you think. Prioritize them and tackle them one at a time.

**Concentrate on teamwork and compromise.** You are both in this together. Having the right attitude goes a long way toward solving problems and strengthening the relationship -- and getting better sleep

**Don't give up.** Changes won't occur overnight. There may be some trial and error to see what works. So stick to it.

Hopefully some of these suggestions are right for you and can help you sleep peacefully, intimately, and lovingly together.