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A Sleep Divorce

How to Sleep Apart,
NOT
Fall Apart



How To Get the Most Out of This Book

We both believe that understanding the social history and evolution of sleep, and the science of sleep, are useful to help you make sense of current sleep issues you are facing. (We assume that because you bought this book, there are some issues you are trying to resolve.)

However, we also understand that you may have bought this book to simply get some practical advice about separate sleeping. So, here's some guidance about how to navigate the pages ahead so you can get the most out what we have researched, learned, experienced, and now share with you.

Interested in the social history and influences on sleep?

Chapters 1 and 3, will give you insights into humans' social behaviour when it comes to sleep and bed sharing.

These chapters will take you through the history of human relationship with sleep, and the evolution of ‘where we sleep and why’. Because of how important it is to us as humans, scholars and historians have been writing about sleep and beds for a long time, which informs a lot of our current bedtime practices. We also provide information for you about what the current thoughts about sleep and bed-sharing are.

Interested in the science of sleep?

Chapter 2 and appendix 1 are for you. Understanding the biology and physiology of why and how we sleep helps us understand our own body and why it does so many weird and wonderful things. Ever heard people talk about being a ‘lark’ or an ‘owl’ and wondered what on earth they are talking about? Ever thought a circadian rhythm was something at a South American dance concert? Well – Chapter 2 will tell you all you need to know about why your body is doing what it does when it comes to sleep.

Interested in how separate sleeping might work for you?

Head to Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7. These chapters will take you through a process to determine if separate sleeping is for you, give you advice about how you can make it work, and offer suggestions about how you can respond to social perceptions and judgements about the practice. We offer a range of perspectives and solutions for couples who maybe just want to try sleeping differently, right

through to making separate bedrooms work for you and talking confidently and comfortably about your choices.

Setting the Scene

This book came about when we were each invited to take part in a panel interview about separate sleeping for *HuffPost Live* (the online network of *The Huffington Post*). When the interview ended, we continued to talk about our shared interest in separate sleeping.

The initial reason Jennifer wanted to write about the issue of separate sleeping came from discussions had when revealed to others that she and her husband didn’t share a bedroom (had never really shared one actually). Through these early discussions, Jennifer developed an interest in people’s perceptions of separate sleeping. Her curiosity set her off on a mission to discuss the topic whenever the opportunity presented itself. What she found was an assortment of attitudes and honesty about the issue, and a recurring theme of reluctance to be open about the practice for fear of social judgement. While Jennifer had no concerns about sharing this aspect of her life (think ‘heart’ and ‘sleeve’ and you have her) she found there were many people who had similar arrangements, but different approaches to sharing them. Intrigued as to why people were so secretive about, what was for her and me, a practical solution to the problem of not being able to sleep at night because of sleeping incompatibilities her investigations began.

As a result of many conversations and the encouragement Jennifer received to share thoughts and

THREE

The truth about bed-sharing

'Laugh and the world laughs with you, snore and you sleep alone.'

*Anthony Burgess*⁶⁵

A bed has many uses. It's a place to read, throw your clothes, watch television, chat on the phone, kiss and cuddle, have sex, jump up and down, cry and feel sad. However creatively we may choose to use a bed though, there's no denying that its primary use is for sleeping. And as discussed in the last chapter, the somewhat prosaic activity of sleeping is an essential daily, human activity. So, inevitably we all retire to the bedroom to get our rest.

If you are part of a couple, heading to the bedroom each night to sleep may, or may not, fill you with a sense of calm and restfulness. Not to labour a point, but falling in love with a person does not guarantee a full complement of items on the compatibility tick list. The

laws of attraction that send us into the arms of another to mate don't consider a raft of incompatibilities that can bite us after the heady glow of early lust wears off.

The 2012 study by the Central Queensland University mentioned earlier found a partner in your bed is more disruptive to sleep than any other noise. In the survey, 57.6% respondents indicated that they slept with a partner, and, of these, 34.5% indicated that their partner disturbed them while getting into bed. 44% stated that their partner disrupted them by tossing and turning, and 58.5% said that their partner's snoring disturbed their sleep. Over 48% said their partner disturbed them by getting up to go to the bathroom at night; 10.1% reported that their sleep was disturbed by their partner getting up to go to the kitchen; 8.1% of respondents were disturbed by their partner answering phone calls, and 35.9% had been disturbed by a partner getting up to go to work.

A 2022 Australian Sleep Awareness survey found that of the 36% of respondents who reported sleeping alone, half of those had a partner. These separate sleepers cited snoring, noise from CPAP machines, and partner movement as the most common reasons for seeking bedroom solitude.

Yet despite all the potential and known problems that go hand-in-hand with the activity, we keep slipping between the sheets with each other with unfailing optimism.

A Parable

If something is presented as normal human behaviour, then you would expect that:

1. humans will have done it for most of their history
2. it would be ubiquitous across most if not all cultures and
3. it would be natural to do it, i.e., you would not have 'learn' how to do it.

In this regard there is no way that alpine skiing can be considered a normal human behaviour in that it is a relatively modern phenomenon, indulged in by a minority of people and cultures, it takes time to learn, some people are better at it than others, some people who have tried it don't enjoy it, and some people just don't fancy doing it.

Now imagine a scenario where someone told you that skiing was, in fact, the norm for humans. They might claim that if you did it as a child, it would be easier to do it as an adult. They might claim that après ski was an excellent time to share the experiences of the day and to make plans. They might claim the health benefits of the exercise and fresh mountain air and ignore the risk of injuries and falls. They might claim that skiing together will make you a happier couple and be an affirmation of your status as a couple and strengthen your relationship. They may claim that because of this, you will have more sex.

All sound good, doesn't it? But then they would also argue that the only way you can ski is to go down the slope in tandem with you partner regardless of your ability, or own ideas about which run you wish to ski and when. You have to ski down the same slope at the same time never more than a couple of feet from you partner, and because you are so close to each other, it is an ideal time to stop, every once in a while, and engage in sexual activity. And the thing is unless you did this, your

relationship was obviously doomed to fail, and you would have fewer opportunities for sex.

This whole scenario would be laughable if it were not precisely the argument that people make for sleeping together.

There are good and bad aspects of bed-sharing. The critical determinant is the needs and wants of each individual and how determined that individual is to have those needs and wants to be met. Bedtime behaviours are in themselves mundane. But add in the human elements of temperament, emotion, power plays, relationship dynamics, traditions, morals, pride, changing attitudes, physical health and personality and a set of mundane behaviours can go from being banal to a battlefield.

As discussed, there is the expectation of couples (especially in most Western cultures) who marry or choose to live together that part of the deal of sharing your life with each other includes sharing a bed.

You are a married couple; you are a partnership and sleeping together is a symbol of that.

Amelia, 41, mother of two, married 12 years

It's a social thing that you sleep together; you're in the same room. Loving parents sleep in the same room – not separate rooms.

Anne, 44, senior manager, married 20 years

Think when you find your soulmate you go with the flow – come on you are married share a bed – not difficult. (sic)

Anonymous, www.mamamia.com.au

Being married for the first time at 44 meant it took me a while to adjust to sleeping with someone after a long time of being single and having the whole bed to myself. Despite this, I never considered not sharing a bed – for me, being married meant that as a couple, we would share a bed together.

Sarah, 52, education officer, married 8 years

When my friends came out from the States in the 1990s and built a house with separate rooms, I thought their marriage was over. Word got around our friendship group, and everyone talked about it and thought the same thing.

Von, 72, married 55 years

My emotional side argues that ‘It’s not normal if you don’t sleep next to your husband. You have to make it work’ and my logical side screams ‘Are you crazy? You need proper sleep! If that means sleeping separately, then so be it!’

Emily, 30, international flight attendant, married 4 years

I think there’s something wrong. Her parents aren’t sleeping in the same bed anymore.

Gretchen Wieners, Mean Girls

The good stuff

Sharing a bed with another person provides a distinct level of intimacy to a relationship that’s hard to replicate. The rituals associated with sharing a space each night, getting ready for bed, spending time alone in the sanctity

of a bedroom and lying next to someone – whether you snuggle or barely touch – are part of a relationship without which some couples simply could not live.

I find shared sleep deeply sexy; often more so than making love. It’s where true love lies, beyond words, beyond sex.

Nikki Gemmel, *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, 21-22 January 2012

Sharing a bed with my wife Sarah gives me a sense of completeness, togetherness and closeness. As we drift off to sleep together each night, I am reassured that all is well with the world.

Thomas, 63, organisational consultant, married 8 years

Physical contact with another human can be calming and comforting and is often sought through sharing a bed and the rhythm of sleep. Many couples speak of the intimacy that bed-sharing brings. This daily act can often be both a personal and public symbol of the closeness a couple shares – usually because sleeping together signifies a closer liaison.

I enjoy the intimacy of sleeping with my partner. I sometimes like to cuddle up to her, and she is receptive although she may be asleep. This behaviour is reciprocal. Sometimes we hold hands, sometimes just rest a hand on each other.

Chris, 51, builder, with partner for 3 years

I love ending the day next to my husband. No matter

what's happened in the day ... our bed is our haven when there's just the two of us. We can share the day, plan the next day, console and cajole. We can be tender and touch or fall asleep from exhaustion with very little said but with the knowledge that we share the bed, an arm's length away and tomorrow another day.

Alana, 60, personal assistant, married 32 years

There is a social aspect to bed-sharing that many couples enjoy and choose to prioritise over disrupted sleep. In fact, some may view sleeping with another person – be it a partner, child, or friend – as a social event in itself. Of course, many people simply like sharing a bed with their partner. The cuddling and chatting, and camaraderie of hopping into this small comfy space each night has a romantic allure and can be wonderful to share with another.

Retiring to bed each night can provide the opportunity to spend quiet time together to debrief on the day, discuss topics you may not want to bring up in front of children, have a serious conversation with your partner on a personal issue, or lie quietly next to each other in that comfortable silence couples develop over time and a life shared together. In an increasingly busy lifestyle, this may be the only time when couples find the time to be alone with the other to meet a myriad of needs.

My wife and I are so busy in our lives that sleeping together is often the only place we can spend time alone together. Just knowing that I can at least touch

her hand and lie next to her is all I need to reconnect each day. I couldn't live without it.

Tony, 47, IT consultancy business development manager, married 25 years

I cherish my time in bed with my partner. I love our little chats before we fall asleep. I love his snuggles in the middle of the night. To the point where I can't sleep if he's not in bed with me.

Trina, www.mamamia.com.au

The one thing I look forward to at the end of each day is the brief moment before we go to sleep when I get to lay my head on my husband's chest and hear his heart beating. We don't talk. But just that brief connection means so much to me. Sleeping together gives us the chance for regular intimacy such as midnight discussions about topics that worry us. Sometimes you can talk about things so much easier when lying next to one another in the dark. Quite often we will hold hands while we are talking about things that worry us and this is reassuring.

Cass, www.villainouscompany.com

Sleeping with another person may also be a habitual activity. Individuals who slept with siblings in a bed or a room as they were growing up may equate safety and security with having another person in close proximity during sleep. There is a gender ideology that women need the protection of men, and this protection may extend to bed-sharing.

*I actually sleep *better* with my partner in the bed. I don't think he makes a physical difference, but there's something comforting about him being there. I find it really hard to sleep by myself now if I'm staying at my parents' or overnight at a party. I almost never wake up refreshed if I've slept alone.*
Shannon, www.mamamia.com.au

I always go to bed well before my partner, so I fall asleep fine by myself, but if he's away and I know he's not coming to bed that night, I can't get to sleep at all! I have to have the TV on in the other room; I hate sleeping when there's no-one else in the house.
Alena, www.mamamia.com.au

Paul Rosenblatt, author of *Two in Bed: The Social System of Couple Bed Sharing*,⁶⁶ says that the cited benefits of sleeping with another are either person-focused, such as warmth, sense of safety and companionship, or couple-focused, such as intimacy, shared experiences and reaffirming the couple's commitment. For those individuals who need a sense of safety security and companionship, sharing a bed can provide this and create an environment conducive to a good night's rest.

So, while there is much that is good, even great, about sleeping with another, there are aspects of the practice that leave a lot to be desired. As sleeping is such a fundamental human need, honestly examining the unpleasant realities of sleep is as vital as enjoying the upside.

The bad stuff

"There is not in my opinion anything in nature which is more immediately calculated totally to subvert health, strength, love, esteem, and indeed everything that is desirable in the married state, than that odious, most indelicate, and most hurtful custom of man and wife continually pigging¹ together, in one and the same bed. Nothing is more unwise-nothing more indecent –nothing more unnatural, than for a man and woman to sleep, and snore, and steam, and do everything else that's indelicate together, three hundred and sixty-five times –every year"
'Dr.' James Graham 1785

Being in close physical contact with any person, in any setting, for an extended period inevitably creates issues. Lying next to the same person night after night can be a breeding ground for all that can be unpleasant between two people. And while there are behaviours and habits our partners have that we can learn to live with, such as leaving the lid off the sauce bottle, or not making the bed first thing in the morning, a 1999 study by the Mayo Clinic found that people don't automatically adjust to sleep disturbances.⁶⁷

Even though Paul Rosenblatt encourages couples to learn to sleep together, he notes the following about sharing a bed: "Sleeping together is an achievement of coordination on many dimensions – where to locate one's head, body, arms and legs, where to put one's pillow,

¹ pigging: OED, from the verb 'to pig' meaning "to huddle, live, or sleep together, esp. in a crowded or disorderly way or in dirty conditions".

how to relate to the blankets, when to talk and not talk, when to touch the other and when not, how to touch the other, what ways of expressing displeasure with the other are acceptable and work, how free one is to toss and turn, what to do when the other makes noise, what to do and not do if one awakens during the night.”⁶⁸

It all sounds like such hard work, doesn't it?

And while each couple faces their own proximity issues, there do appear to be some clear winners in the litany of complaints from bed sharers. We're going to look at the 'bad' parts of bed sharing in two categories. First, there are the actual *in-bed* bed behaviours, and then there are the habits and behaviours *around* going to bed.

While these behaviours that can disrupt one partner's ability to sleep, there may also be hidden or more serious medical issues. One person's bed-time annoyance could, in reality, be another's life-threatening medical condition. Throughout the chapter, we will provide information about medical conditions that might lie behind your partner's night-time behaviours and offer some possible solutions that might be of help to you both.

Snoring

Snoring is by far the most common reason why one partner will disturb the other's sleep. And, sorry guys, but it does tend to be men who are most guilty on this charge. The National Sleep Foundation of America supports this stain on your good characters.

Persons most at risk are males and those who

are overweight, but snoring is a problem of both genders, although it is possible that women do not present with this complaint as frequently as men.

The physical and medical reasons for snoring are complex and varied. They range from having one too many alcoholic drinks to life-threatening conditions such as sleep apnoea. So, whether it's the man or the woman snoring in bed, it's a prevalent problem, and it keeps a lot of people awake. Snoring also becomes more frequent and louder as we age. And that's for both men and women. So, if you are smugly reading this and have not yet reached your forties – it's all ahead of you.

I hated my husband because of his snoring. I hated that he could keep me awake and not even know he was doing it. When I would kick him and say 'Please stop snoring' he would say, 'I'm not snoring – what are you talking about?' and then it would be my problem, and I would be furious with him. We could not have stayed in the same bed together because I really resented him for it. I resented the way he reacted. He didn't wake up and say 'I'm really sorry keeping you awake' he would wake up and say 'Stop kicking me – why are you kicking me?' and then resent me.

Frances, 40, mother of 3, married 10 years

When my husband snores I want to say 'go away you sound like a troll'. I think snoring is one of the most unattractive things a person can do. To me, it's a hideous sound, and there's nothing appealing about

someone who snores. So if I can't hear his snoring, he looks much nicer and much more appealing to me.

Rebecca, 47, counsellor, married 20 years

My snoring simply became an issue for us. John tried earplugs, but he couldn't wear them for more than three nights in a row, and I felt bad that he had to.

May, 66, retired, married 40 years

I sleep in a separate room from my partner of more than 20 years because of his snoring. We downloaded an app that measures decibels, and his snoring was at the same sound level as a food processor makes grinding nuts!

Anonymous, www.mamamia.com.au

My father's snoring eventually ended our family holidays in caravans. My brother and I would be up in the annexe at 2 am playing cards because Dad's snoring was as loud as a train.

Kate, 46, lawyer, married 12 years

My mother is renowned for her snoring. To the point where I can only describe it as a whipper snipper next to you! And she snores no matter what, front, back and sides! My father's only saving grace is he falls asleep really quickly and easily, so it's usually not a problem.

Trina, www.mamamia.com.au

Unfortunately, snoring is something over which we have little control. While intermittent snoring can be controlled

through fewer beers or wines, for many people, it is embarrassing and a source of frustration. It is a pity that unintended behaviour can have such a significant impact on so many couple's lives. It is genuinely mystifying that some people tell of years of no sleep due to a snoring partner, and yet they have done nothing to address the situation and continue to complain of no sleep.

While your partner may only emit a gentle purr that disturbs you occasionally, the voracity with which some people snore can be quite alarming. The average snorer emits a noise level of 50 decibels. This is equivalent to the noise generated by a normal conversation at home or a large electrical transformer 100 feet away.⁶⁹ The Guinness Book of Records⁷⁰ reports Koere Walkert from Sweden as one of the loudest snorers. Measured at 93 decibels on 24 May 1993, his snoring is as loud as a belt sander. However, Walkert is a lightweight compared to Jennifer Chapman in Britain, who was recorded snoring at 111.6 decibels at a snoring boot camp in 2009.⁷¹ This puts her as just a little louder than a chain saw, not quite as loud as a hammer drill, but still 8 decibels louder than a low-flying jet.⁷²

As a guide,⁷³ anything over 70 decibels is when your hearing can start to be damaged – so spare a thought for Jennifer Chapman's husband. Sensibly though, he does often sleep in another room, with both bedroom doors shut and sometimes with his head under a pillow.

And fortunately for Jennifer, she wasn't married to John Wesley Hardin. An outlaw who lived in America in the late 1800s, Hardin reportedly shot a sleeping stranger in the room next to him because his snoring was keeping Hardin awake.⁷⁴ While many of us may have thought of

such extreme action as well, fortunately for thousands of snorting and snuffling partners, we have exercised far greater restraint.

Sleep Apnoea

We have all heard or told stories that involve great feats of snoring that are the cause of disturbed sleep. Although people who snore loudly are frequently the target of bad jokes and the occasional victims of middle-of-the-night elbow thrusts, snoring is no laughing matter. Loud snoring can be a sign that something is seriously wrong with your breathing during sleep. Snoring is a sign that the airway is not fully open and the distinctive sound of snoring comes from efforts to force air through the narrowed passageway.

It is estimated that 10-30% of adults snore. For most sufferers, snoring has no serious medical consequences. But for an estimated 5% of people—often overweight middle-aged men—extremely loud, habitual snoring can be the first sign of a potentially severe disorder—Obstructive Sleep Apnoea (OSA). OSA has a particular pattern of breathing during the night with pauses in the snoring followed by gasps as the breathing starts again. These pauses can last from a few seconds to over a minute and can occur hundreds of times a night. People who have OSA don't breathe properly during sleep; therefore, they do not get enough oxygen. Patients with OSA can have very disturbed sleep often without knowing it; all they may know is that they feel very sleepy during the day.

OSA can seriously disturb sleep producing extreme levels of sleepiness during the day interfering with work and personal life. People with OSA may have trouble concentrating and can become unusually forgetful, irritable, anxious, or depressed. These problems can appear suddenly or can emerge gradually over time. If these problems develop over time, it is common for sufferers to ascribe the sleepiness during the day to the consequences of normal ageing. Because OSA puts a strain on the body, it can trigger high blood pressure, heart failure, heart attacks and stroke and has been linked to a significantly increased risk of car accidents due to the daytime sleepiness.

Often people with OSA seek help for disturbed sleep not realising that OSA may be to blame. People with OSA may notice that they are frequently waking during the night, gasping for air, and thrashing about in their sleep. Because they are often not aware of what is happening during the night, which is why information from the bed partner is so all-important. Sufferers may also complain of morning headaches, and loss of interest in sex and men may experience erectile failure. OSA is most often found in middle-aged men, but anyone can suffer OSA—even children.

It is imperative to seek medical advice if you or your bed partner suspect either of you suffers from OSA. There is good news; however, in that OSA can usually be effectively treated. If you have mild sleep apnoea treatment may include advice on lifestyle management, including helping people lose weight, stop smoking and/or decrease alcohol consumption. Severe OSA is routinely treated with a device known as CPAP

(Continuous Positive Airway Pressure). Other treatments, such as mandibular positioning devices are also available and are useful for some patients. You should consult your GP about the available options.

Movement

Movement in bed can range from innocent repositioning for comfort, through to restless leg syndrome and flailing limbs that can turn the bed into a nightly replay of a good old-fashioned gladiator epic. Some people find they have partnered with a ‘floundering whale’ who flops around the bed all night, taking the sheets and blankets with them, oblivious to the innocent soul shivering on the other side, fuming quietly or whimpering sadly.

The reality is that sleeping involves movement, especially during the light sleep stages. We all change sleeping position around 20 times a night⁷⁵ but Professor Jim Horne, director of Loughborough University’s Sleep Research Centre, notes that men seem to shift around more than women.⁷⁶ In an experiment conducted at the centre, movement sensors placed on men and women found that men move around twice as much in the night. This fact may help settle some arguments about bedclothes that go awry on a nightly basis.

And while innocent and simple movement might just be annoying, sharing a bed with a ‘human windmill’ can be life-threatening. There are documented cases of women who have bruised breasts from being rolled on during sleep. Ouch!

I like a lot of personal space. I like to sleep in different positions. On my back, on my tummy, arms behind my head, arms to my side, arms straight up like a soldier (rarely, but I like to keep my options open), legs splayed, knees drawn up to my chest, hanging from the chandelier wearing bunny ears and a tail (okay, so that one is my husband’s fantasy). I don’t like to be restricted in my movements by anyone pushing my limbs out of the way when I fancy a good stretch.

Kerri, 44, author and blogger, with husband 20 years

My husband and I regularly, accidentally punch or elbow each other in the face at night. We have a queen size, but I think we need to upsize to avoid injury.

littlemisschloe, www.mamamia.com.au

Where do I begin? I have been elbowed and kicked more times than I can remember, had his arm ‘thud’ on me as he turns over, and pushed with such force that I am jolted out of sleep with such a startle I find it hard to get back to sleep sometimes. I know he doesn’t mean to do it and is always apologetic, but I often wonder if it would be a legal reason to justifiably let me hurt him.

Chloe, 32, accountant

While having someone kicking, punching, tossing, and turning in your bed may be very annoying and disturbing to your sleep, Meadows et al. found that about one-third of objectively measured nocturnal awakenings were

common to both bed-partners – effectively meaning that one or other of the bed partners was waking the other when they themselves woke. There could be several explanations for movements during the night most of them are natural and normal however some can be serious medical problems.

Periodic Limb Movement Disorder (PLMD)

PLMD is a sleep disorder where the sufferer repeatedly makes kicking and jerking movements with their legs or arms during sleep, usually without being aware of it. As the sufferer is unaware, they are doing it, the bed partner is the one to notice this behaviour. The repeated movements can disturb the sufferer's sleep, and similarly to sleep apnoea; they may notice that they are suffering from daytime sleepiness for no apparent reason. Women are more likely to suffer from the condition than men and causes can include too much caffeine, stress, and other mental health problems so if your partner repeatedly jerks their limbs during the night or indeed frequently seems to punch or kick you then you should investigate PLMD.

Restless Legs Syndrome (RLS)

RLS is a neurological movement disorder involving unpleasant feelings occurring in the legs and described as painful, tingling, itching, or prickling. Because these unpleasant feelings occur at rest and are relieved by movement, RLS sufferers have difficulty sleeping. Approximately 5-10% of the population is affected,

although it is twice as common in females as in males. About 80% of those with RLS also have PLMD (see above). Deficiencies in substances, especially iron, are likely to play a role in RLS. RLS is extremely common in pregnancy, particularly during the 3rd trimester. Iron and/or vitamin B12 supplements have been found to be helpful in reducing RLS as is having cold/warm compresses and massage. Also, as with most other sleep problems, avoiding caffeine, nicotine, and alcohol can help.

Sleepwalking

Sleepwalking, aka somnambulism, is a general term used to describe disorders where people perform simple behaviours during their sleep. These can range from simply sitting up and looking around, to walking around and performing tasks usually done while awake, e.g., going to the fridge for a drink of milk, going to post a letter or even getting in a car and driving. Somnambulism occurs during deep Slow Wave Sleep (SWS) sleep.

Sleep is not an 'all or nothing' phenomena. Parts of your brain can be asleep while others are awake. This means that if during deep sleep a particular part of the brain wakes up—partial arousal—then it is possible to carry out behaviour for which that part of the brain is responsible for, e.g., walking, talking, etc., without being conscious of it, because the conscious part of the brain is still asleep.

Sleepwalking is reported to occur in approximately one or two per cent of adults. There is a strong genetic link in the occurrence of sleepwalking, but other causes

can include over-tiredness, stress, sleeping pills, alcohol – essentially anything that fragments sleep can precipitate these partial arousals. Adopting a regular bedtime and avoiding things that can disturb sleep help, but it is also essential to make the environment as safe as possible. Because sleepwalking occurs during deep sleep, it is most liable to occur in the first third of the night in adults.

Sleep Sex

Sleep sex—or sexsomnia—is a parasomnia that can occur during deep sleep and involves a person engaging in sexual activities (including penetration) while still asleep. In extreme cases, sexsomnia has been alleged as the cause of instances of sexual assault, including rape. Sexsomnia do not remember the acts that they perform while they are asleep. Sexsomnia can co-occur alongside other sleep disorders such as sleepwalking, sleep apnoea, night terrors and bedwetting. It can be triggered by stress, previous sleep deprivation, and excessive consumption of alcohol or drugs. Such ‘extreme’ behaviour is, of course, going to disturb the bed partner but perhaps, more importantly, it is probably going to be hard for the bed partner to understand the fact that this behaviour is not intentional.

REM Behaviour Disorder

REM behaviour disorder is a condition that is often confused with sleepwalking. As its name suggests, REM behaviour disorder occurs during REM sleep, not SWS like

sleepwalking. Usually, during REM sleep, we lose muscle tone so that we cannot act out our dreams as such we are effectively, temporarily, paralysed. However, in some people, this paralysis does not occur, and therefore they can physically act out their dreams. REM behaviour disorder can occur because of drugs of abuse, medicines or alcohol or in people withdrawing from them. It can also be a precursor of Parkinson’s disease and is common in dementia. Also, there is a tiny population of otherwise normal older men who seem to become chronic sufferers.

Menstrual Cycle and Sleep

For women, the hormones oestrogen and progesterone that play a role in regulating the menstrual cycle can also influence sleep and circadian rhythms. Many women report 2–3 days of disrupted sleep during each cycle with an increased number of awakenings and other sleep disturbances during their premenstrual period. This leads to an increase in restlessness and thus increased fidgeting, which can disturb a partner’s sleep. Oral contraceptives affect body temperature regulation, and this can affect sleep. Women on oral contraceptives have more stage 2 sleep and less of the restful and restorative deep sleep.

Pregnancy and Sleep

Sleep is disrupted substantially during pregnancy and postpartum, with a prevalence of insomnia ranging from 15% to 80%. After conception, most women report

daytime fatigue and the need for longer night-time sleep. From the second trimester onwards, the time spent asleep begins to decrease and sleep quality becomes poor. During the second and third trimesters, nocturnal awakenings, fatigue, leg cramps, difficulty in sleeping in certain positions and shortness of breath become more common. Pregnant women, particularly during the final trimester, have a heightened risk of snoring, sleep apnoea and restless legs syndrome.

Menopause

Menopausal women often experience hot flashes during the night that can disrupt sleep. Ninety per cent of women experience these symptoms with 25-50% describing sleep disturbances. Hot flashes and night sweats can cause repeated awakenings because of the sensation of heat and sweating as well as increased heart rate and anxiety. Because the sleep disturbance is related to temperature, it is important for sleep to have a cool temperature in your bedroom with light, cotton, bed linen and you want to avoid anything that also raises body temperature before bed.

Night-time comfort breaks

Another everyday movement during the night is one partner getting up to go to the toilet. The increase of ensuite bathrooms in modern houses means that not only is there disruption from the act of getting out of bed; there can also be some disturbingly audible proof of the activity.

For men sharing a bed with a pregnant woman, frequent toilet trips during the night – while good training for the sleeplessness to come – can be equally as disturbing.

While I understand that my husband needs to go to the toilet during the night, must the activity involve the broken waterfall effect, a couple of farts and that much sighing? It's always been a bone of contention between us. He won't even shut the door – 'it takes too much time'.

Sue, 48, married 12 years

I know it's wrong to be angry about things related to pregnancy, but my wife would go to the toilet about 5–6 times a night in the last couple of months of her pregnancy. I was too frightened to tell her that it was really disturbing my sleep. I just drank a lot of coffee at work. It wasn't a great time.

Simon, 43, IT manager

About 6 months into my pregnancy, I just moved out into the other room. That way I could spread out, toss and turn and go to the toilet as many times as I needed.

daisy123, www.mamamia.com.au

Nocturia

One of the leading causes of sleep impairment as we get older, besides those associated with natural ageing, is nocturia, i.e., needing to go to the bathroom multiple times during the night. More than one bathroom visits a

night is considered a problem, and the more often you get up to go to the bathroom, the more disturbed your sleep will be. The frequent nocturnal awakenings and the resultant sleep disturbance associated with nocturia can result in a severe disruption of sleep, leading to daytime fatigue and sleepiness together with a decrease in cognitive functioning and alertness.

Rates of nocturia increase with age. So, while 10% of the general population over 20 years has nocturia two or more times per night, in the 50-59 age group, 58% of men and 66% of women experience nocturia. It is also important to note that while the sleep disturbance of the person with nocturia is of primary importance, it should also be remembered that the sleep of the bed partner can also be significantly disturbed by nocturia, which unlike many other sleep disorders actually requires the sufferer to get out of bed.

Temperature

The different preferences in sleeping temperature are another way to heat things up in the bedroom, whether talking about bed coverings, breezes through an open window or air conditioning.

Research suggests that men don't perceive temperature as sensitively as women, which is why they feel warmer. One theory is that women tend to have more blood circulating their core organs, and less around their extremities, such as their hands and feet, which are the body's temperature sensors.

Hands up, those ladies who have slipped their cold

feet or hands on to body parts of their male partner to warm them? Jennifer knows that she will hear the loud protests of her husband when she slips into her husband's bed for a cuddle before heading to her bed for the night. Similarly, hands up, anyone who hates it when your partner tries to suck the warmth from you with their cold hands or feet? And if we are really being honest... who hasn't had a bit of a giggle when angling your cold bottom into your partner's warm embrace for a quick spoon before you slip off to sleep? Yes, it's all good fun, until one of you feels that you are being used as a human water bottle.

Typically, women prefer their sleeping environment to be warmer than men. This is backed up by Paul Rosenblatt's research; he found that 75% of the heterosexual couples he interviewed reported that when one of them was warmer than the other, it was usually the man. But not always. A woman can be the partner generating the most heat. Research has shown that women's body temperature rises by as much as one degree towards the end of their menstrual cycle.⁷⁷ Hormonal changes during pregnancy and menopause can also lead to a raised temperature.

My husband and I have had trouble sleeping together. I tend to sleep 'hot' and prefer a thinner blanket, while he sleeps 'cold' and likes a giant quilt. It took two and a half years, but we realised along the way that instead of a nightly debate over whose favourite blanket we would use, we would each cram our own onto the bed. We no longer have the 'your blanket makes me too hot/cold' discussion in the morning.

Kate, www.mamamia.com.au

My wife requires more warmth in the bed. She needs a quilt most nights to sleep under, but I want to toss it off. Each person requires their own comfort level.

Bruce, 68, married 3 years

I was undergoing chemotherapy and radiation and became impossible to sleep with. My changes in body temperature became a big issue for us both and part of the raft of reasons we moved to separate beds.

Brooke, 52, education professional, married 30 years

My husband likes to be very scientific about things. So when I reach for an extra blanket, wriggle my icy feet and complain 'it's cold ...' he'll look at the thermometer he has nearby for just such occasions and tell me that it's not cold, because it's 20 degrees in the bedroom. Different people just feel the cold differently. I can see that from my kids – one cocooned under a mound of blankets, the other spreadeagled on top of the sheets. When you are sharing a bed though, that can be tricky. I have surrendered any notion of enjoying an electric blanket. He tolerates the quilt in winter, so long as most of the feathers have been distributed away from him. Little by little, we have reached an accommodation about the arrangement of blankets – and the desirability of bed socks – even though I know we will never agree on whether it is 'cold'.

Kate, 46, lawyer, married 12 years

Bedroom temperature can play a significant role in ensuring good sleep. In general, the bedroom should

be cool. This is because during the night your body temperature naturally drops; thus, the body needs to lose heat, and this is done mainly through the head and face as these are the only bits that usually stick out from under the duvet. Thus, a cool bedroom facilitates this heat loss, (Interesting historical fact – as bedrooms have become warmer, so the wearing of a nightcap has disappeared!).

So how cool is cool? Well, many experts say that the ideal temperature for the bedroom is approximately 16-18°C (60-65°F), although this is a matter of personal preference. However, while a cool bedroom is essential, it is also important that the temperature in your direct sleeping environment, i.e., under the duvet, is comfortable. This temperature should be close to a thermo-neutral temperature (i.e., approx. 29°C). Usually, you can heat your 'sleeping space', to the correct level solely with the body heat you generate during the night but if the bed is unusually cold, a hot water bottle can help get the temperature to a comfortable level.

If the room is too hot, or you are too hot under the duvet, it is more difficult for the body to lose the body heat that it needs to, and this will cause disturbed sleep. (Note that this is the reason why alcohol and big meals should be avoided too close to bedtime, as they are both highly calorific the body has to burn off these calories, this generates heat, and thus the body needs to shift this extra heat additionally). Poor sleep can also result if you are too cold in bed either because the room is too cold, so you lose too much body heat, or the bed is too cold so that it is hard for the body to achieve its optimal temperature for sleep (a hot water bottle, bed socks or even wearing a nightcap can help).

Getting your bed partner can complicate achieving the right temperature as they may need a different combination from you to achieve their comfortable sleep temperature. This is particularly important for women because of the hormonal fluctuations they experience through life interfere with their ability to lose body temperature, and this can make their sleep more disturbed and increase restlessness during the night. Using two single duvets on a double bed maybe a way around this or there are some duvets available that have a different tog rating on one side than on the other.

The correct temperature in the bed and bedroom is vital for good sleep and involves the right combination of air temperature, duvets, bedclothes, etc., to hopefully achieve the correct result for you.

Breathing

Whether we are asleep or awake, respiration just keeps on happening. Like snoring, this is an uncontrollable behaviour as we don't know that our mouth falls open after we fall asleep. However, as the wee hours of the morning approach, the wafting smell or the raspy sound of a loved one's breath is less than welcome.

After 15 years and three kids together a queen bed just doesn't cut it, when it is time to sleep, I need my space! I have to face away from my hubby while sleeping; I hate being breathed on! I have actually said to my hubby that things would be a lot better if he didn't breathe overnight! Daytime breathing only!

Sarah, www.mamamia.com.au

I hate, hate, hate being breathed on! I tell Mr W he is like a dragon breathing on my neck and the sound is like a plane taking off in my ear!

Whippersnapper, www.mamamia.com.au

A king-sized bed has made the sleeping experience better. In our queen-sized bed, I always woke up with a cricked neck from sleeping facing away from him as I hate being breathed on in the night.

Anonymous, www.mamamia.com.au

Like snoring, poking and prodding might make the problem of a partner breathing in your direction stop, but just like snoring, for how long? We do wonder if Darth Vader ever shared a bed with a partner.

Children and pets

Those who follow through on the laws of attractions and produce children often face additional demands on their bed real estate. Not only do you have to share with your loved one, but you may also have to share your minimal and prized space with some little loved ones as well.

For some, bed space may progress from a small crib to a bigger cot, to a single bed, to a double or queen bed – all by yourself. Then you start sleeping with your partner, and your bed space is halved, then the children come along, and you find yourself gripping on for dear life to the last foot of space at the edge of the mattress as the toenails of your toddler rake your calves.

The balancing act of trying to allow everyone in a

family to get enough sleep often forces the hand of many parents who give in and let children share their bed.

After years of bed-hopping to accommodate our two children who would not spend a full night in their own bed, we gave in and just started sleeping with one child in our bed and one of us in the spare bed in their room. It's been close to 10 years now, and even after recently paying them \$5 a night to sleep in their own bed, after about four weeks, the eldest boy started coming through to our room again, so we are back to sleeping apart.

Michael and Liza, 41 and 39, married 10 years

My partner and I have been together 8 years and slept in separate rooms for about 3 years now. I used to and probably still would love sleeping with him, but since we have had kids, 2 boys within 15 months that both co-sleep, I've shifted to the spare room. We have a king-sized bed, but I was still constantly annoyed and as a result, waking up shirty too. He loves the kids in the bed, and it honestly doesn't bother him if he is woken up by a foot in the face or a cry for a cup of milk. I used to feel guilty, but now I don't, I realise sometimes you gotta do what you gotta do!

Lola, www.mamamia.com

The one positive aspect of this shared-sleeping problem is that it has an endpoint. Most parents can be confident that they won't have to co-sleep with or make room in their bed for, their teenager. At least, one hopes not.

Some people could easily substitute 'pet' for 'child'. In fact, we'll bet there are some who have done it already. Some of us are more than happy to share our beds each night with a furry creature, but others think that any animal in the bed is a non-negotiable 'no'.

So, what happens when you meet your soul mate, and the whirlwind romance leads you to the bedroom to find that Fluffy gets to sleep in the middle of the bed, and then at the bottom, and later in the middle again, and then back to the bottom each night? Because humans can become terribly attached to their animals, this issue can be as significant as the arguments for or against children sleeping in bed.

One reason why, for most of human history, men and women have not shared a bed is the fact that for most of this time, the accepted norm was for mothers to sleep with their babies. And given the number of children women had in the past, this probably meant most of their married life. This practice is still prevalent in much of the world, including countries like Japan and India. By sleeping next to its mother, an infant receives protection, warmth, emotional reassurance, and is easily feed. However, recently in Western societies, the practice of mothers and infants sleeping together has been actively discouraged. While this is not the place to thoroughly rehearse the arguments for and against co-sleeping it should be noted that Western parents are taught that they should not co-sleep with their child, and two reasons cited for this advice are that:

1. it will make the infant too dependent on them
2. open up the risk of accidental suffocation or Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

On the issue of a child becoming too dependent on their mother the, albeit few, psychological studies done in this area suggest that children who have 'co-slept' in a loving and safe environment become better-adjusted adults than those who were encouraged to sleep without parental contact or reassurance.

One of the findings of Klösch et al. was objectively "...that women are more disturbed by the male presence in bed than the man by a woman's presence" and that this may be due to that fact that "women appear to react more to the presence of another individual in bed. This may be a logical consequence of the maternal role in infant sleep and development". From an evolutionary point of view and throughout history, and still, in most cultures, it is the woman's role to sleep with the baby to monitor the baby through the night. However, because we have recently replaced this very natural way of sleeping with 'couple sleeping' the woman is still functioning in her evolutionary 'mother mode' of monitoring the person in bed with them.

So, in simple terms, women have poorer sleep than men when they co-sleep because women are essentially reacting to the man in the bed in the same way she would do to an infant monitoring their breathing and their movements to ensure that nothing is wrong. Basically, our society has replaced the infant in the mother's bed with the partner who in this respect is just a huge baby.

There were gender differences in the perceived causes of sleep problems; women are more likely than men to perceive children and pets and partners as causes of their sleep problems.⁷⁸

It should be remembered that cats and dogs can

snore just like humans. And although dogs can and will adapt to their owner's sleeping habits and positions, cats cannot, or more probably will not, give up their lifestyle and will sleep wherever they feel comfortable—however much that may disturb you. In a survey only presented as a poster, but often referred to in the media, Dr John Shepard,⁷⁹ the Mayo Clinic in the USA, asked 300 patients seeking help for sleep disorders about their pets and sleep. He found that 53% of pet owners considered that their sleep was disrupted by their pet to some extent every night. However, only 1% felt their sleep was disrupted for more than 20 minutes a night on average.

To cuddle or not to cuddle

Is your idea of sleeping heaven when your partner takes you in their arms and holds you tight through the night until dawn's rays slip through the curtains the next morning? Or does this scenario fill with you dread, make your hands shake wildly at your side, and make you feel icky and want to say 'ewwww'?

Just like we have different tolerance levels about activities such as holding hands and cuddling and kissing in public, some of us don't want to be held in a loving embrace all night. Because men generally fall asleep faster, women can be left trapped under a well-meaning but vice-like arm. There is also the problem of ongoing physical contact creating sweaty bodies that are neither pleasant to feel or smell nor great for the sheets.

Spooning your loved one as you succumb to blissful

slumber makes for a great visual in the movies but doesn't really accommodate the human need for changing positions as we cycle through our sleep patterns every night.

I'm at the start of the trying to convince a newish boyfriend that sleeping separately is okay. Yes, I love the snuggling and the cuddling, but when it's time to sleep I really dislike being touched. I'm a light sleeper and have rheumatoid arthritis, so it's hard for me to get comfortable enough to sleep well at the best of times. Having a boyfriend who feels the constant need to be touching me somehow rather complicates things. It's a really hard topic to discuss with him without feeling like I'm being cold or mean!

Em, www.mamamia.com.au

I like to cuddle up to my wife's back as we fall asleep together – I think it's called spooning. After enjoying this for about 5 minutes, I face reality, rollover, and arrange my 3 pillows the way I need them so I can sleep comfortably.

Max, 43, company director, married 18 years

Other in-bed sleeping problems

While one could fill a good portion of this book with what can go wrong when lying in a bed next to another; we'll leave the discussion there and leave you with a list of further complications that can be found between the sheets. The list is not definitive, which is why there are

some spaces at the bottom to fill in the ones you think we've missed.

- The size of the bed
- The firmness of the bed
- Who gets to sleep on which side of the bed
- Sheet textures
- Amount and size of pillows
- Different sleep positions
- Teeth grinding
- Sweating
- Getting up in the middle of the night (not just for the toilet)
- Waking from dreams and nightmares
- Going to bed angry
- Sleepwalking
- Sleep talking
- Insomnia
- Illness – temporary or long term
- _____
- _____
- _____

Despite what women say ...size does matter

A standard UK double bed is 4 ft 6 ins wide which means you and your bed partner each have 2 ft 3 ins (68.6cm) of space. However, the single bed that you had as a child was either 2 ft 6 ins (76.2cm) or 3ft (91.4cm), which means as an adult you have in essence got either 3 ins (7.6cm) or 9 ins (22.9cm) less space to sleep in than you

child. Your child shares their bed with a ‘glow in the dark’ Teletubby. You, however, share your bed with a kicking, punching, farting, snoring, duvet hugger, and you wonder why you are not sleeping well. So, one of the easiest ways of getting a better night’s sleep is to get a bed that’s more than 4 ft 6 ins (137.2cm) wide, essentially get a bed as big as you can fit into your bedroom.

As well as nightly tussles when in the bed, there are also the struggles that happen before you even reach the bed or turn out the light.

As outlined in the last chapter, sleeping needs differ from person to person. If you are lucky enough to share similar sleeping needs in regard to getting ready to sleep, the time you go to bed and how long you need to sleep, then well done. However, the reality for many is that they have different bedroom behaviours that can wear down a once happily-shared activity.

Preparing to sleep

Human behaviour is swathed in habit and ritual. Learned behaviours that are replayed consciously or that happen without much thought at all, guide us through each day, week, month, and year. When it comes to going to bed, having a ritual or routine is something that begins when we are babies and don’t have the slightest idea of the conditioning to which we are being exposed. Cultural factors vary, but many of you have experienced the practice of children having a set bedtime routine that involves a bath, a story reading and then being tucked into bed nice and early. This traditional approach to our

early sleeping behaviour is often the origin of the rituals we adopt as we grow older, which leads me to the first, widespread habit that people have when it comes to going to bed – reading before sleeping.

Similar to snoring, to read or not to read before sleep is an everyday battle fought out in beds across the world. The Big Sleep Survey⁸⁰ conducted in 2010 in Australia, with over 12,000 people participating, found that 40% of people like to read when they go to bed, while the Central Queensland University study⁸¹ reported that 59.7% of people like to read in bed. Both results are significant. Reading in bed is a disruptive activity (for the sleeping party) that involves having a light on as well as movement and sound (from the page-turning).

Having a room of one’s own was a revelation. First, there was the realisation that I could read as long as I wanted, even with the main light on if I so desired. I’ve always read in bed – right from the days when I used to hide a flashlight under my pillow so I could continue after my mother had pronounced: ‘Lights out.’ But during the years of sharing a bed with David, this habit had become one of our great bones of contention: ‘Can’t you turn off the light? I can’t sleep.’ Even a specially purchased, tiny light that hooked over the cover of the book was too much for him. He would complain he couldn’t sleep, and when I hid it over the edge of the bed, ruining my eyesight in the gloom, he would whine, ‘But I can hear you turning the pages!’ But then he liked to fall asleep with the radio on, and you can’t concentrate on your own novel when Radio 4’s ‘Book at Bedtime’

is burbling in the background. Now, though, I can do as I please.

Dame Jenni Murray, British journalist and broadcaster for *The Guardian*

My husband is a shift worker, which is an issue. Being an 'owl', I never felt that I could go into my bedroom and feel free to do anything. No activity with noise was allowed, and no reading could happen because there was to be no light in the room. I missed reading in bed.

Anne, 44, senior manager, married 20 years

Neil is a reader, and I can't sleep with the light on. When he would read all night because he couldn't sleep, I would go to the spare room. Now though, he will mostly go to the spare room to read as he needs to, to help him get back to sleep.

Ann, 46, HR professional, married 19 years

As we got older and I became more liberated, I thought why should I have to go to bed when he wants to go and why should I have to turn the lights off when he wants to go to sleep. If I wanted to continue to read, he would complain about the light from my table light keeping him awake.

Von, 72, married 55 years

Watching television in bed is another activity that some find relaxing and soporific, and others find it anything but. A 2009 study⁸² of 21,475 adults by the Division of Sleep and Chronobiology at the University of Pennsylvania

found that television viewing is the most dominant pre-sleep activity, accounting for almost 50% of pre-bedtime, a statistic which was repeated in the Central Queensland University study. The topic even featured prominently in the movie *Sex in the City 2*: Carrie was most unhappy when Big decided to install a television in the bedroom of their New York apartment.

TV creates light and sound and causes similar problems to reading between couples.

I will never cease to be amazed at how my wife's interest in crappy TV increases in direct proportion to how late at night it is. She will be fighting to stay awake, but intent on getting to the end of another 'Celebrity Something' show no matter what the cost is next morning. The hum of the TV keeps me awake in itself, even without any volume. I will sometimes fall asleep on the couch just to avoid watching the rubbish. It really annoys me, but she insists it helps her sleep. I think it just helps her stay awake.

Wilson, 43, married 15 years

TV had a great bearing on us moving to separate rooms. Margaret had a TV in the bedroom, and I hated it. Absolutely detested it. Why? When I go to bed, I go to bed to sleep. If I want to watch TV, I can do it in the lounge room. When I wanted to go to sleep, Margaret would have to turn the TV off and go out to the lounge room to continue watching her show. And then she would disturb me when she came back to bed.

John, 58, building contractor, married 30 years

My husband watches TV to wind down and fall asleep. The problem was that he would lie on the couch to watch TV, fall asleep, but when he woke up, turned the TV off and walked down the hall to come to bed, he would be too awake to fall asleep again. He just stays on the couch now.

Suzette, 40, administrative assistant, married 17 years

Then there are those who can't face eight hours of slumber without nourishment and take a snack to eat and/or drink when they hop into bed. Despite the risk of crumbs or drips and drops of food in the bed and on the bedclothes, an American study found 32% of people polled take meals and snacks to bed.⁸³

My husband eats in bed, which I cannot stand. He leaves plates and bowls and water bottles by the bed. I love lovely linen, and every time I bought new linen, it would have chocolate ice cream or chocolate on it, which would never come out. I don't have that now, because he is eating in his bed, in his room.

Anne, 44, senior manager, married 20 years

Staying connected

Developments in contemporary living create new challenges for the modern couple; an array of devices such as laptops, notebooks, tablets, e-readers, and smartphones are now a feature of pre-sleep activity. For some couples, it's not just pre-sleep either, but also during the night and first thing in the morning. Wireless networks are commonplace in homes and have given

technology addicts the ability to be online anywhere and anytime.

Almost a third of participants in the 2010 Australian Big Sleep Survey⁸⁴ keep a mobile phone in the bedroom at night, with TVs, laptops, iPads, and radios found in roughly 15% of bedrooms. In 2011, Ikea⁸⁵ conducted a study of two million people and found that 22% admitted to using a computer in bed (the Central Queensland University study reported 77.9% of respondents said they used a laptop in bed⁸⁶).

Compelling and arguably essential reasons such as checking emails, Facebook and Twitter updates, financial information and sports results are the most common reasons for justifying the need to take a device to bed. And it's not just the fact that your partner is more interested in the screen than you, it's the audible detritus that comes with the electronica.

Salmela, et al⁸⁷ found that 13% of people described being disturbed by their partner's use of electronic media in bed. Individual use of smartphones in bed was found to be the normal practice among a majority of participants, being largely used to aid relaxation, and in preparation for sleep.

My husband has headphones listening to music when I am trying to sleep. I can still hear the music, and it drives me nuts. (I think it is very anti-social for him to have headphones in bed!)

Anonymous, www.mamamia.com.au

The iPad is the third person in our relationship. Morning, noon and night, my partner is emailing

friends, work colleagues and all the other stuff like Facebook and the web. He knows I don't like the iPad being used in bed, but thankfully I mostly fall asleep, and it doesn't disturb me.

Pete, 32, banking professional

Just as books create noise when pages are turned, devices will 'bing' and beep with alerts; click when keyboards are used and throw out a luminous glow that can light up a room just as much as a bedside light. Many of us enjoy being able to sit in bed and use our laptop when needed or watch videos on our iPhone. Our bed partners may be very attached to their iPad using it last thing at night and first thing in the morning.

If this is the area that troubles you most, there is a comprehensive study available that was done by the Sleep Foundation in America in 2011⁸⁸ about devices in the bedroom.

There have been numerous studies showing that computer game playing, internet use, television viewing, possession of mobile phones and socialising are linked with reduced sleep, and reduced opportunities for sleep in teenagers,⁸⁹ and there is no reason to believe the same is not true of adults.

One of the other problems of technology use is that exposure to artificial light, particularly from LED light, commonly used in TVs, computer screens and handheld electronic devices such as tablets during the evening and at night, can block the effects of brain cells that help promote feelings of sleepiness, as well as suppressing the release of the 'sleep hormone' melatonin. At the same time, artificial light can also stimulate brain cells

associated with alertness. This is because LEDs produces a light that is rich in blue and blue-green spectrums, which are the colours that are interpreted by the brain as signifying daytime.

Therefore, using these blue light-rich screens at night will be disruptive to our sleep. So, avoid using technology such as your smartphone, iPad, TV, and laptop at least 45 minutes before your intended hour of retiring.

Light and sound

A dark, quiet room is the gold standard for sleeping. But how quiet is quiet? And how dark is dark? The earlier chapter on the science of sleep touched on the answer for why we prefer a dark environment, but it's a little bit of a 'chicken and egg' question. As melatonin is produced in the body when it gets dark, this means that we tend to sleep when it's dark; and we also need darkness to produce the melatonin to make us sleepy. Prior to the invention of electricity, artificial light didn't confuse our melatonin production, so more people retired to bed earlier. Also, without power, there weren't as many night-time activities anyway, so going to bed was the preferred option for most people.

A recent US study⁹⁰ found that sleeping in a room with too much light can cause depression. Scientists that conducted the study found that "even just the glow from leaving the television on while you sleep can be enough to trigger the effect and a lack of darkness during sleeping hours can cause changes to the brain and depressive symptoms". Some people do not like a completely dark

room, possibly the result of having a night light as a child, and equally, some cannot bear even a sliver of light disturbing their sleep.

Noise in the bedroom can take many forms. We have already touched on issues such as noise from the turning of a page and sound from electronic devices. However, on the opposite end of the spectrum, there are people who like to have constant noise while they sleep. A commonly sought sound is the constant hum of an air conditioner or a fan. For some, this is more than just a temperature issue; it's that they can't sleep without some type of noise in the bedroom – they cannot 'do' quiet. Our individuality dictates the degrees of dark and quiet; we need to create our optimal sleeping environment.

While not my story, I clearly remember a school friend's sister who slept with clocks in her room. We're not talking a couple: if memory serves, it was over 20. All clocks were ticking clocks, and I was always fascinated by how she could possibly sleep at night. Being a light sleeper, it has been a story that has stayed with me. As she was unmarried at the time I knew her; I used to think about what her husband would say and do when she eventually married. I still do.

Holly, 33, British public servant

I cannot sleep without the fan on in the room. It's not only the feeling of the air moving over my body but the constant hum that it makes. For me, that 'hum' drowns out any other noise that might keep me awake.

Brian, 47, transport worker, married 22 years

How dark is dark?

Light, particularly blue-rich light from the sun or computers smartphones, etc., can inhibit the secretion of melatonin, which is a hormone that signals the body that it is time for sleep. Even small amounts of light, e.g., from your alarm clock, can be detected through closed eyelids. Therefore, your bedroom needs to be as dark as possible, use opaque curtains or blackout blinds to block light from outside, just a few minutes of sunlight is necessary to tell your body that it is daytime. Inside the room, remove or cover light-producing devices and remember that clocks with red digits are less disruptive than ones with white or blue digits; so, either replace yours or turn it to face away from you.

The sound of silence

Your bedroom should be as quiet as possible. The World Health Organisation says that overnight the sound level should be an average of 35dBA with intermittent peaks of 45dBA. It is a simple fact that some noise can disturb sleep, the reason for this is that when you sleep, you are vulnerable, seemingly unaware of your surroundings. From an evolutionary point of view, this would put you at a disadvantage, i.e., something big and hairy can find and eat you, so you have to be alert to threats even while you are asleep. Because of this, each of us wakes up hundreds of times during our sleep to check that we are still safe and secure.

These awakenings are very short, no more than 1-2

seconds, and you are not aware that you have them. If the brain does not detect anything of 'importance' then you can safely go back to sleep, however, if you perceive something in the environment that is not right, e.g., an unexpected noise, your 'primitive' brain needs to be sure that this is not a threat. So, you become fully awake to process and rationalise what is going on. However, you do not wake up to each and every noise, the sound has to be 'meaningful,' i.e., the brain perceives it as important or a threat, for it to disturb your sleep. This means that you can get used to sounds that initially seem very disturbing. This will take at least a couple of weeks as your brain works out that a particular noise is not a threat, and it is safe for you to ignore it.

The fact that you can adapt to some sounds in time does not help when you are staying somewhere temporarily, such as on holiday, so in these situations, it is probably easiest to just carry some earplugs. Of course, if the sound is loud enough regardless of how meaningful it is, it will wake you up, particularly in the latter part of the night when your sleep is naturally lighter and more easily disturbed. Ideally, your bedroom should be as quiet as possible, but this may not be an easy option. If you cannot create a quiet bedroom, then you might want to try using other sounds, e.g., listening to relaxing music or the drone of an electric fan, to distract the brain from the more disruptive noises. It doesn't matter what noise you listen to; the most important thing is that whatever it is your brain does not have to listen to it actively, so your favourite piece of music will probably work best.

Sleep Sanctuary

When at the University of Surrey, Neil designed the finest bedrooms ever constructed for sleep. They were incredibly quiet, temperature-controlled and when you put the lights out, they were very, very dark, (the other key points were a single bed and a teddy bear!). The construction of the bedrooms was a brick-built outer room an inner suspended room consisting of 10cms of acoustic foam and 10cms of acoustic tiling which gave a room-to-room sound attenuation of approximately 85 decibels. This essentially meant that the world's loudest snorer could sleep in the room next door and their snoring would not be loud enough to wake you up. So, although these rooms were pretty much the ideal sleeping environment, they are also probably everything that your bedroom at home is not.

The first important thing to remember is that your bedroom should be the room devoted to sleep. It is the 'bed' room, not the office, games room, gym, or cinema, or even your sex dungeon but the place for sleep. Some languages, such as German 'schlafzimmer' and Dutch 'slaapkamer', make this explicit it is the 'sleep room'. Therefore, everything about the room should be devoted to the optimising of sleep, and thus as discussed elsewhere, it should be cool, quiet, dark, and comfortable. But more than that it should be a sanctuary from the stresses and strains of the world, a place where you can feel safe and secure, a retreat from daytime life.

Up and go

How do you like to be woken in the morning? By a pair of twittering bluebirds gently rousing you from your night of slumber with their songs? Or by the shattering blast of a hard rock radio station so that you know for sure you are going to stay awake? Are you a serial snoozer who must hit that button for another 10 minutes of sleep so many times that you struggle to catch the bus each day? Or are you a lark who went to bed so early that dawn's first light woke you and allowed you to pop out for a quick half-hour run before most of us even realised it was day?

How we are woken can impact on our mood and attitude right from the second we open our eyes. As noted, being woken at the wrong time in your sleep cycle can leave you feeling out of sorts and struggling to get your eyes open and find your nice inner person. If you've ever been accused of 'getting out of bed on the wrong side', it could be attributed to when you were woken rather than where you were in bed.

If a couple retires to bed at different times, but wake at the same time, the nature of sleep cycles adds another level of complexity to sleeping together. If one of the couples is in the middle of a deep sleep cycle when awakened, they may find it difficult to adjust immediately and feel groggy and disoriented for several minutes. This disorientation could be the reason why you're getting out of bed on the wrong side!

When my alarm goes off in the morning, sometimes, it takes me forever to get my act together. I call it 'cotton wool brain', but it can sometimes last all

morning. A couple of times that I have been up early to take people to the airport, I have had to go back home and sleep more because I know I haven't actually woken up yet. I can drive and talk and do all that, but I'm not 100%.

Lulu, 42, legal professional, married 6 years

Similarly, being woken by a loud, unpleasant sound might just really annoy you, irrespective of in which sleep cycle you are.

My ex-boyfriend Brent wanted the radio alarm clock tuned to a hard rock radio station. I hated it. We agreed to swap every fortnight to the radio station of my choice, but on the mornings when a song I disliked (of which there were many) blasted me awake, it immediately put me in a bad mood. Similarly, the roles were reversed when my station was the wake-up call. Could we have chosen another way to wake up? Possibly, but two strong personalities don't always search for a rational solution. And my ongoing sleep deprivation from having to share a bed with him did not make me the most rational person at the time.

Wendy, 49, Communications

As mentioned in Chapter 2, sleep is regulated by two body systems—sleep/wake homeostasis and our circadian rhythm or body clock—and it is our circadian rhythm that dictates whether we are a morning person or evening person. 'Morningness' and 'eveningness' is in no small part, genetically determined. Therefore, if you are in

a couple where there is a lark and an owl, your circadian rhythms are going to conflict. If one of you wants to go to bed and/or get up at the same time, there will have to be a negotiation of sleep timing and ultimately some form of compromise by one or both of you about when you go to bed and getting out of bed.

However, compromise just means there is the chance of one (or two) miserable people, e.g., if you're an owl going to bed too early, you are working against your circadian rhythm which means you are going to find it harder to fall asleep. Because your circadian rhythm is, to a large degree, genetically determined you cannot 'train' yourself to become a lark or an owl, although you can reduce the effects. For instance, owls would benefit from getting exposure to daylight as soon after they wake up as possible. Larks may find that getting out in the daylight late afternoon/early evening helps them to stay awake longer.

Meadows et al.⁹¹ found that although couples went to bed at the same time, this was not necessarily their preferred bedtime "suggesting that couples do not necessarily want to go to their shared bed at the same time".

As with the 'in-bed' behaviours, there are more personal quirks and proclivities that manifest themselves in the bedroom and serve to disturb a sleeping, or attempting to sleep, partner. However, we will move on to the behaviours that some folk don't like to talk about in polite company, but we all know what happens when the sun goes down, and we head to our bedrooms.

The stuff we don't really like to talk about

There are some human bodily functions and activities that we all know about, but don't like to mention. A few of these activities take place in the bedroom, and the bed, and it's time to talk frankly about them.

Beeping your own horn

Animals do it. Humans do it. Apparently, humans do it on average 14 times a day. It's a natural bodily process of which we shouldn't be ashamed. It makes some people laugh uproariously and embarrasses others. It can be innocent and private or offensive and very public. Yep, we're talking about passing wind, or to be very blunt, farting.

On the list of bodily functions, we can't control, this one sits on the margins. While the passing of wind can happen unknowingly during sleep, we all know of people who boast of producing redolent emissions in the bed and the effect it has had on a poor, unsuspecting partner. But most of us have endured such behaviour and fail to see the humour. This does tend to be a behaviour that amuses and entertains men more than women – if you question my gender bias on this claim, just search 'farting in bed' on YouTube.

Unfortunately for men, physiologically they are more prone to farting because they generate more gaseous product in a day than women, and this gas is released when they are most relaxed. This, even more unfortunately for their partners, is likely to be in bed.

How to Get a Good Night's Sleep and Keep Your Relationship Alive

For some couples, heading to separate beds or rooms is a no-brainer. For others, it can look and feel like the beginning of the end. A 'Sleep Divorce' sounds scary, but it doesn't need to be. Hundreds of thousands of couples across the world have healthy, happy relationships, but they don't share a bed every night.

This book will help you understand why sleep is so important, why you need to prioritise it, how sleep has evolved throughout history, and why we are made to think we must share a bed every night with our partner.

This is a practical guide, backed by science and first-hand interviews, to help you navigate your way to a great night's sleep without compromising any aspect of your relationship.

A Sleep Divorce promises to help couples only 'divorce' where they sleep at night, not each other.



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