

Old Mattresses Cause Chronic Back Pain

Switching to a new mattress can significantly reduce back pain and stiffness, according to a study published in the January 2006 issue of *The Journal of Chiropractic Medicine*.

The study by Oklahoma State University found that subjects who suffered from persistent back pain found immediate and significant relief by switching to a new mattress and that the improvements persisted past the initial switch. It also found that subjects sleeping on mattresses five years old or older were significantly more likely to suffer from back pain and stiffness.

The team at Oklahoma State University studied a control group of 59 healthy participants (30 women and 29 men) who slept on their own 5+-year-old mattresses for four weeks and then slept on a new bedding system for the same time period. The study analyzed the difference in lower back discomfort, spine stiffness, sleep quality, comfort, and efficiency.

Subjects reported immediate and sustained benefits in all areas of measurement following their transition to a new mattress, regardless of their age or weight. This was especially true of participants who entered the study with high back pain complaints; they reported a 63 percent improvement in back discomfort.

According to the article in *The Journal of Chiropractic Medicine*, while health care professionals are often asked to recommend a bedding system that can reduce sleep disturbances and improve sleep quality, there has been little or no consistent information or benchmark for doctors to reference. According to the study's authors, "Health professionals may safely recommend a medium-firm sleep surface with a certain degree of confidence for patients experiencing minor musculoskeletal sleep disturbance."

To determine if the mattress is a cause of sleep problems, the Better Sleep Council of Canada recommends inquiring about the ABCs:

- **A** (age): Has the mattress had more than eight years of nightly use?
- **B** (beauty): Does it have stains, soil, or tears? Does it sag?
- **C** (comfort): When you lie down and concentrate on the comfort of your mattress, does it feel the same as it did when you first tried it at the store?
- **S** (support check): When you lie flat on your back and place your hand under the small of your back, how much space is there? (You should be able to move your hand around.)