Sharing the Bed? 7 Ways to Get Great Sleep With a Bed Partner

Do you have a hard time sleeping while sharing the bed with your partner?

January 11, 2022 By Michael Breus, PhD

I've written in the past about sleep divorces, but this is something a little different. Perhaps you just got into a new relationship and are sleeping with a new bed partner, or you decided to end the sleep divorce and start sleeping together again. Whatever the reason, getting used to someone else in your bed can be a challenge and may leave you feeling unrested in the morning.

Let's take a look at what you can do to solve the problem.

If you've been here a while, then you know how important proper sleep is to your health—you need a full night of quality sleep in order to function. It's the same thing when sharing the bed with another person. Good sleep is vital for both partners' health as well as your relationship; poor sleep can hurt both.

Why Sharing a Bed May Be Difficult

Sharing a bed with another person is a very personal, intimate experience, and if you're used to sleeping alone, this may be a significant adjustment period. In fact, your partner can ruin your sleep, or you ruin theirs.

A few ways one person can disrupt another's sleep include:

- Loud snoring
- Being a restless sleeper— tossing and turning, or moving a lot in bed
- Different temperature preferences
- Different sleep cycles or schedules
- You have kids who want to sleep in the bed with you

Sleep deprivation can make both partners irritable, frustrated, and exhausted. Let's fix that!

7 Tips for Better Sleep With Your Partner

If sharing the bed has gotten difficult or uncomfortable, don't put up with it. Whether comfort or another person is the source of your sleep woes, there's always a solution.

1. Get a Bigger Mattress

A full bed or a twin bed are cozy enough for one person, but they will probably be a little uncomfortable for two average sized adults. Those mattress sizes are designed for a single sleeper— a queen-sized mattress is the most popular choice for couples because they give each person more space to sleep and move during the night.

Selecting a new mattress can be a daunting experience if you don't know what exactly you're looking for. If you're not sure where to start, check out my guide to choosing your next mattress.

Many couples opt to buy a larger bed or mattress when they move in together or get married. If you have a guest room, that's a great place for your old mattress. But if you don't have the space— and if it's clean and in good shape— I recommend donating your old mattress to a local organization or charity. If the mattress is showing its age though, recycling is the better option.

2. Solve Snoring Problems

Snoring is one of the most common problems between bed partners. A snoring bed partner can not only ruin your sleep, but loud snoring can be a sign that they may have nighttime allergies or an underlying sleep disorder like obstructive sleep apnea (OSA).

Some remedies you can try if your partner snores include:

- Wear earplugs or use my favorite, the Bose Sleep Buds II— In full transparency, I've been a spokesperson about sleep for Bose in the past.
- Using a sound machine or a white noise machine— these play soothing ambience that can cover up the sounds of a snoring partner

If you're the snorer, try these options:

- Sleep on your side— this helps keep your airways open and helps reduce snoring
- Use over-the-counter treatments such as nasal strips or dilators to open your nasal pathways.
- If you have nighttime allergies, decongest for better rest. I recommend using the SinuSonic or a saline solution rinse

If you want more information on the topic, check out my article about how to stop snoring.

3. Sleep According to Your Own Schedule

Not every couple will have the same sleep schedule, especially if one person works outside of normal work hours.

It’s also quite possible that you and your sleep partner are different chronotypes— one of you may be a morning person, while the other is more of a night owl. If you’re not sure what this means, your chronotype works closely with your circadian rhythm to determine your ideal times for being awake and for being asleep.

Sleeping and going about your days according to your respective chronotypes can help you both stay well-rested and energetic, but this can be tricky if your chronotypes are polar opposites. It is possible to get a good night’s sleep on different sleep schedules though. The most important thing to do is to sleep according to your individual schedules—falling asleep with your partner is amazing, but neglecting your ideal sleep schedule can make you both tired, run-down, and frustrated.

If you sleep at different schedules, be careful not to wake your partner as you enter or leave the bed. If you wake up before your partner does, or vice versa, let them sleep and wake up on their own.

4. Try Different Sleep Positions

The right sleep position can make a big difference when it comes to comfortably dozing off with your bed partner. What’s comfortable for you and your partner will vary, but it shouldn’t be too hard to find a comfortable position for you both to doze off in together.

Can Your Sleep Position Indicate Problems in Your Relationship?

Some believe that the body language associated with various sleep positions may be clues that a relationship is thriving, or even struggling. For example, sleeping close together may indicate you and your partner being close or comfortable with each other, while sleeping back to back could indicate underlying conflict.

However, this isn’t always the case. Two people sharing a bed may be comfortable in any number of positions, and just because you prioritize comfort over cuddling doesn’t mean that there are problems lurking below the surface. Work with your bed partner to see what positions are most comfortable for you both. On that note…

5. Communicate With Your Partner

Communication is key in any relationship— this is also true for your sleeping arrangements. Leaving potential problems unresolved can build resentment and frustration, so if there’s anything that isn’t working with you and your partner’s sleep, talk to them about it.

Compromise may even be necessary. But don’t worry, finding a happy medium doesn’t have to be difficult.

- If one partner goes to bed earlier or later than the other, an eye mask, earplugs, or both can make sure that one partner does not disturb the other.

- If one person sleeps hot or cold, find a compromise with the thermostat. Alternatively, if one partner sleeps cold, they can layer on more blankets. If they sleep hot, fewer layers or something like the Chilisleep system can ensure both partners are comfortable at their ideal temperatures.

These are only two examples of where you and your partner may need to compromise in the bedroom. As long as you keep communication open and fair, you can both rest easy.

6. Make Your Bedroom More Sleep-Friendly

A few extra concessions in the bedroom can go a long way towards making you and your partner sleep well. Give some of these a try if you're looking for options to make your sleeping environment even better.

- Consider using lighter sheets, a lighter duvet or a lighter blanket on your bed. Two bodies generate a lot of heat— this can help make sure neither partner gets overheated.
- If both partners have opposite preferences for the duvet, consider using two separate covers.
- An eye mask is handy if your partner's light usage— like reading before bed, device usage, or even outdoor light— may keep you awake.
- Ear plugs are handy for masking any noise from a snoring bed partner as well as any other ambient noise that can keep you awake.

7. Keep the Kids Out of the Bedroom

It's a fact of life that as soon as your kids are old enough to sleep in their own beds, they'll want to sleep in the "big bed" with their parents. This is fine if it happens infrequently and everyone's able to fall back asleep quickly. However, the parents' bed should be for the parents.

Encouraging kids to sleep in their own separate bed will not only be better for your sleep health, but theirs too. Kids learning to fall asleep on their own and sleep independently from their parents tend to sleep better each night and be more pleasant during the day. This also helps them establish healthy sleep habits that'll help them as they grow.

Keeping kids in their own beds is especially important if you have a new baby. Many parents may choose to co-sleep with their infants, because it may help them feel more connected to their babies, or help encourage breastfeeding. You may want to avoid this though because when it comes to babies, safe sleep should be top priority. Aside from being potentially uncomfortable for the parents, co-sleeping is also associated with an increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), as well as suffocation or other fatal accidents.

Your infant can still sleep in the same room as you, but to reduce any SIDS risk you'll want to have your baby sleep in a bassinet or crib rather than in the bed with you. Once they're between 4 and 6 months old, you can begin sleep training them—this helps your baby learn to fall asleep by themselves, and stay asleep during the night.

What If I Still Can't Sleep Comfortably With My Partner?

If you or your partner are still experiencing frequent sleep disturbances, be sure to rule out a sleep disorder. Sleep disorders can ruin the sleep of not only the affected sleeper, but their partner can sleep poorly as a result too.

Contact a sleep expert or a sleep center near you as soon as possible to get tested and see what your treatment options are. Disorders like obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) or insomnia can contribute to a lot of physical and mental health issues, so the sooner you get treated, the better you'll sleep.

Even if you and your partner are compatible in other ways, sometimes you may just struggle to sleep well together. It just happens, and you shouldn't take it personally.

If this is the case, then perhaps a "sleep divorce" may be a good idea. But don't worry, this isn't as ominous as it sounds. 25 percent of American couples are sleeping apart, and that number is climbing. If sleeping apart is a good idea for improving you and your partner's individual sleep, give it a try—good sleep is vital not only for your individual health, but for your relationship's health too.

While I always recommend addressing any sleep problems in the bedroom before resorting to different sleeping arrangements, this can be a helpful choice if you've exhausted other options.

Sharing a bed with another person can be an intimate and wonderful experience, but it does require some compromise. As long as you and your partner communicate openly and honestly, sharing the bed can be a breeze.

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