

What's the Best Mattress for Back Pain?

by [Sleep Junkie](#) February 7, 2018



Short on time? Featured in this post:

- [Learn how to find the best mattress for a bad back](#)
- [What does chronic back pain have to do with mattresses?](#)
- [Back pain & sleep: A look at the facts](#)
- [Top beds comparison table](#)
- [Is the best mattress for back pain soft, medium, or firm?](#)
- Is the best mattress for back pain cool or warm?
- Fighting back pain on a budget
- [It's decision time!](#)

Learn how to find the best mattress for a bad back

Are you trying to find a **good mattress for back pain**? Some of the hardest medical conditions to treat and cure are those relating to chronic back pain, something that affects millions of people worldwide every day.

Individuals everywhere are constantly searching for the best mattress for bad back pain. This shouldn't be surprising—along with chiropractic treatments, having a comfortable mattress for great sleep seems to help the most for reducing chronic back pain—and preventing it altogether.

While identifying the best or perfect mattress remains a hotly debated topic, opinion polls and sleep professionals indicate that specific types of mattresses are better than others when it comes to pain management and support.

Sleep Junkie's Recommended Mattress for Back Pain: [Amerisleep AS2](#)

Let's dive into the facts. We'll take a look at:

- How your mattress choice can ease your discomfort—or make it worse.
- The best mattress for back pain, including a comparison of the top brands.
- What everyone with chronic back problems should know about memory foam.
- How to find relief even if you aren't in the market for a new mattress right now.

Where does back pain come from?

Back pain comes from many places. It has been reported that the majority of back pain is caused by either an injury, occupational strain, the daily stresses of sleeping on a hard, soft, or uneven surface, or a combination of the above.

Back pain is the top cause of disability in people [under 45](#) years old. Of course, younger people are at risk, too. Taking care of your back in your 20s and 30s can go a long way towards staving off issues later on.

According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), the conditions most commonly linked to back pain are muscle or ligament strain, bulging or ruptured discs, arthritis, skeletal irregularities, and osteoporosis. It's clear there is no singular cause, but there are common factors. Understanding these factors and using them to manage your discomfort is one of the most effective ways to lessen back pain.

Most forms of back pain have one thing in common: they get worse after a bad night's sleep. Whether it's the result of a one-time injury, a chronic problem, or just the aches and pains of everyday life, back pain will only worsen on an uncomfortable mattress. Tossing and turning

may aggravate the underlying cause. Too much pressure on the wrong part of the body can make you feel worse than when you went to bed.

In many cases, managing a chronic back problem comes down to finding the best mattress for back pain. Getting a good night's sleep reduces stress, takes pressure off injured or strained areas of the body, and helps alleviate pain.

What does chronic back pain have to do with mattresses?

While a lot of prevention efforts focus on daytime habits, it's equally important to pay attention to reducing back pain in bed. While a person sleeps, many things go on in their bodies that involve their backs.

For instance, while sleeping, the pressure is gradually released from your vertebrae. This is because you're lying down, not standing or sitting up. Your upper body is no longer applying pressure to your spine.

That's why, when a person wakes up, they can be up to one inch taller than when they went to bed. As the day progresses, pressure returns with gravity, and various factors (like poor posture) compress your spine throughout the day.

The effects of poor sleep can be even worse depending on your sleeping position. Stomach sleepers are particularly affected since that position places extra pressure and strain on the neck and spine.

But the truth is that everybody can be affected by a bad night's sleep, no matter what position you prefer. This is especially true if you already suffer from chronic back pain. Going to bed on a creaky old mattress is only going to make things worse.

Back pain & sleep: A look at the facts

Just how much of an impact can back pain have on sleep? The facts might surprise you:

- Lower back discomfort is the single leading cause of disability worldwide. It's one of the most common reasons for missed work. Up to 80% of us will experience it at some point in our lives, says the [American Chiropractic Association](#).
- Pain is a key factor that keeps many Americans from getting the quality sleep they need. In fact, sleep disturbance is a top complaint among patients dealing with a chronic back or joint problem.

- Those suffering chronic pain in their back or joints get around 42 fewer minutes of sleep per night, according to the [National Sleep Foundation](#).
- People with pain feel like they have less control over their sleep, and are more likely to worry about whether they're snoozing enough.

Better Nights for Better Days

The good news is, you do have control over your sleep quality. If back discomfort is a chronic issue, investing in the right mattress can significantly improve the quality of your sleep—as well as your well-being while you're awake.

Your spine and the muscles supporting it rest while you sleep at night. As you settle into a horizontal sleeping position, proper alignment and support are essential to reducing and avoiding soreness while you're in bed.

It's important to note that even if your back pain is caused by an injury or a chronic condition, getting a peaceful night's sleep with good support and alignment can be the difference between pain that's manageable and pain that interferes with everyday life.

There is also a [pain-and-sleep paradox](#). Pain can certainly make it harder to get comfortable and enjoy a great night's sleep. But at the same time, getting poor sleep can increase the severity and perception of pain.

Choosing a comfortable bed can lead to several important improvements including easing soreness and pain, reducing pain severity, facilitating better rest, and preventing new aches.

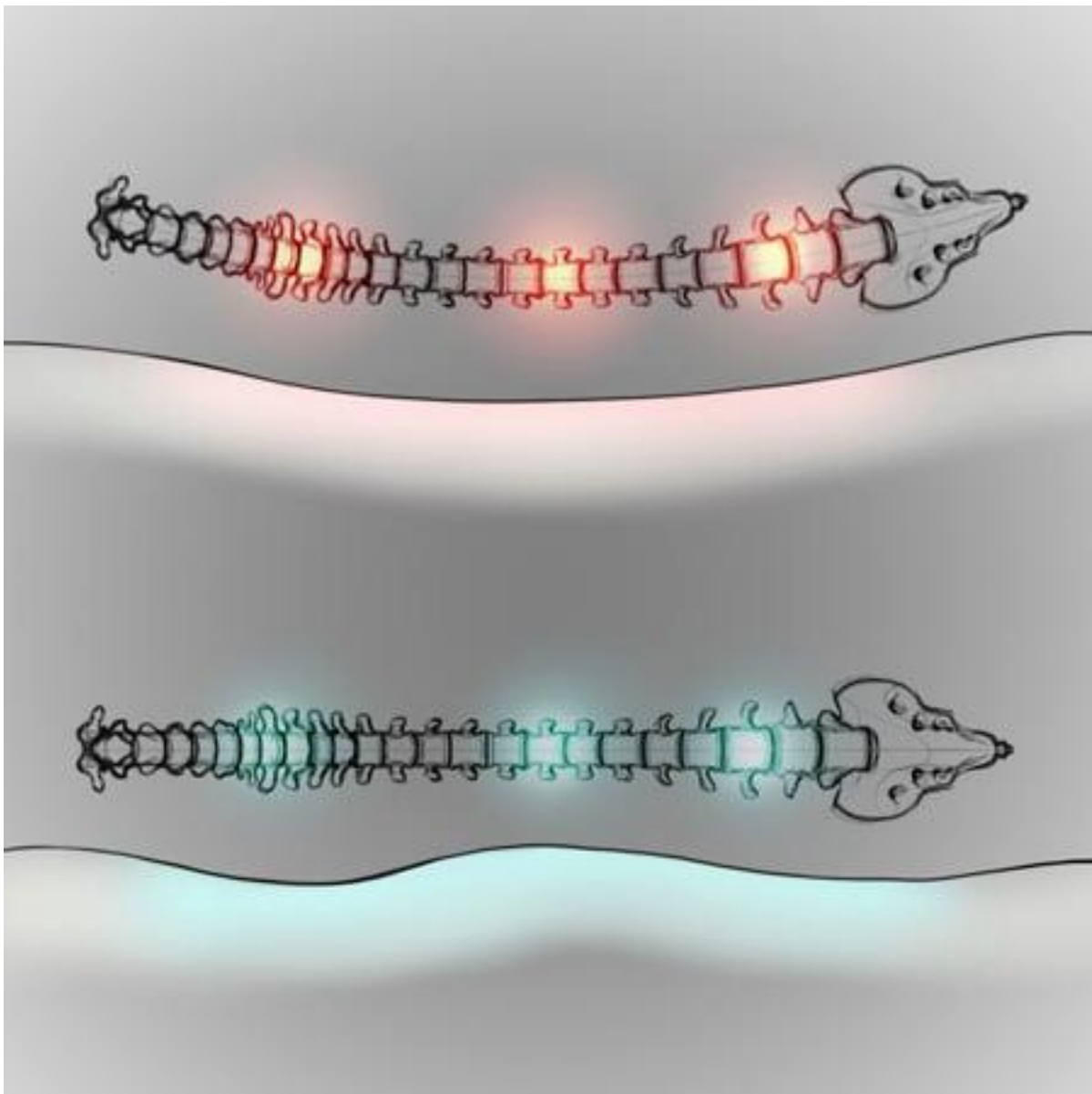
Top beds comparison table

Mattress Model	Type	Price - Queen	Rating
Amerisleep AS2 <i>Sleep Junkie's recommendation for the best mattress for back pain</i>	Memory Foam (Plant-based memory foam)	\$1,199	4.7/5 Read reviews
Simmons Beautyrest Legend Preston 17" Luxury Firm Pillow Top	Hybrid (Pillow top, memory foam, micro coils, and latex)	\$3,049	3.9/5
Sealy Optimum 12" Elite Courage Plush	Memory Foam (Gel memory foam)	\$1,949.99	4.4/5

Read our full review of the best mattresses [here](#).

It shouldn't come as a surprise that sleeping on a lumpy or unsupportive surface can lead to discomfort. Sinking too deeply into a mattress can throw your joints out of alignment, causing them to twist and become uncomfortable as the night goes on.

But sleeping on a too-firm surface can interfere with the spinal cord's ability to reach its proper alignment. Years ago, doctors recommended that people with back pain sleep on a very firm mattress. But no longer. Recent [surveys suggest](#) that people who sleep on very hard mattresses (sometimes called orthopedic mattresses) actually have the poorest sleep quality.



Sleeping with a straight, natural alignment relieves the pressure points commonly associated with many back pains.

Finding a mattress that provides the right level of support, while also encouraging a comfortable and uninterrupted night's sleep, can take significant stress off those pressure points and help your spine relax.

An investment in better sleep

The types of mattresses that tend to rate highest for pain relief are either memory foam or high-quality latex, with spring beds performing poorly in reviews. Beds that are very thin and inexpensive also tend to have worse long-term satisfaction when it comes to comfort.

High-quality foam mattresses conform closely to your body's shape. This allows the wider parts of your body, like your hips and shoulders, to sink in while the narrower areas of your body, such as your waist and feet, simply lay atop the mattress.

Sleeping with a straight, natural alignment relieves the pressures commonly associated with many back pains. A mattress with poor conformity or support forces the body to rest at an unnatural angle and prevents tense muscles from fully relaxing.

The ideal bed will be based on each person's situation and preferences. Some people have a preference for the feel of memory foam, while others prefer the feel of latex. Things like materials, layer thickness, and firmness will depend on your body weight, sleep style, and other factors.

That being said, there are a few basic guidelines that can help inform your search.

What makes memory foam best for a bad back?

Traditional spring mattresses are flat and plank-like. Stiff springs cause you to lay unevenly, whether you're a side or back sleeper.

When it comes to a back sleeper, plank-like surfaces force the spine to arch and leave the inner knee unsupported. This prevents the lower back from decompressing and causes several types of strains and pains.

Let's picture why this might be the case. The hips and the upper shoulders are the parts of the body that protrude the most; the heel of the foot does as well. While lying on your back, your hips touch the mattress, as well as your shoulders, and your heels dig in.

However, on a firmer bed, the lumbar region of your back remains arched. On firmer beds, there might be noticeable space between the lower back and the mattress. Your inner knees barely

have a supporting surface, and your head tilts uncomfortably backward. This all adds up to a very uncomfortable night of sleep.

By comparison, medium-firm memory foam or latex mattresses are better choices. These sleep surfaces perform well because they don't force the spine to curve into unnatural positions while you sleep. Instead, they allow the parts of your body that need to sink to do so, while still giving support in the places that require it. Hips and shoulders are cushioned, while the lower back is fully supported and able to relax.



Choose a memory foam mattress that is made from natural, plant-based material to avoid harmful chemicals and overheating.

Will memory foam make me too hot?

Memory foam is one of the few sleep surfaces that can fully conform to your body's natural curves, to provide support exactly where you need it. But does that benefit come with a downside?

You might have heard that memory foam mattresses can trap heat and leave you warm during the night. So even though your back doesn't hurt, you're still uncomfortable overall. Which defeats the purpose.

It's true that some memory foam mattresses made from synthetic materials like polyurethane can trap heat. But that's not the case for all memory foam mattresses. Those made from natural, plant-based materials tend to offer cooler and more comfortable sleep.

Amerisleep's AS2

Made of Bio-Pur®, an advanced, open-cell construction for 5x more breathability.

Features an aerated design that enhances circulation instead of trapping heat so you won't wake up sweating.

Uses HIVE® technology, which was [clinically shown](#) to reduce pressure points up to 49%.

Other Memory Foam Mattresses

Made from heat-trapping polyurethane foam, which offers limited breathability.

No aerated design means that air doesn't circulate.

Some can actually cause painful pressure points instead of reducing them.

Why memory foam mattresses are a great option



Amerisleep's AS2 provides the right amount of support for back pain

Based on everything we've looked at, medium-firm memory foam mattresses are perfect for those suffering back pain. Unlike innerspring mattresses, memory foam contours the entire body

without any gaps. Most often, medium-firm mattresses let the spine rest in a natural, comfortable position.

Our research indicates that [Amerisleep's AS2](#) is a good choice for medium-firm memory foam. Amerisleep uses high-quality materials for strong back support and pain-free sleep for many years.

There's more. The memory foam used in the AS2 and other Amerisleep mattresses recovers its shape faster.

A quality mattress starts with quality materials

With typical memory foam mattresses, you might wind up “stuck” when you switch positions while you wait for your memory foam to adapt—this can take up to 60 seconds. The AS2 bounces back in just four seconds, so your mattress keeps up with you while you move at night.

When it comes to reducing back pain, the AS2 also has Amerisleep's HIVE® technology. HIVE® is [clinically shown](#) to reduce pressure points up to 49%. It works by grouping hundreds of six-sided foam supports into five comfort zones to provide targeted pressure relief.

For places where you need more cushioning, like your shoulders, the HIVE® layer has more space between the foam hexagons. That way those zones will compress more. And for zones where you need more support, like your head and feet, the HIVE® layer has less space between the hexagons to provide more reinforcement.

Beyond quality materials, Amerisleep also uses the latest performance technology like [Celliant®](#), an advanced fabric, to further improve your back pain.

Celliant® is determined by the FDA¹ to temporarily promote increased local blood flow at the site of application in healthy individuals. It does that by safely converting body heat to infrared energy that penetrates into your muscles and increases blood flow in that area, which can help increase comfort and promote restful sleep.

Learn more about memory foam with our [Mattress Buying Guide](#).

Is the best mattress for back pain soft, medium, or firm?

Now that we've sorted through the different types of mattresses, it's time to answer another essential question for sufferers of back pain: How firm should my mattress be?

Is it better to go with a soft and cloud-like sleep, or should you take the old advice that the firmest bed is best? The answer may be neither, or possibly a combination of both options.

It has long been believed that a firm bed is the best choice for people who suffer from a bad back. But in reality, firm mattresses remain a hotly contested debate between orthopedic doctors and chiropractors.

Orthopedic doctors recommend firm mattresses, while chiropractors recommend medium-firm mattresses. In fact, [one survey](#) found that around 75% of orthopedic surgeons recommend firm or hard mattresses to their patients.

However, [recent surveys have shown](#) that hard mattresses might not be the best choice. The majority of chiropractors were probably right in recommending their patients sleep on medium-firm mattresses.

Overall, medium-firm mattresses are the most recommended, especially for back sleepers.

The expert opinion

In two [separate studies](#), Oklahoma State University researchers found that a medium-firm mattress was the most effective at reducing clinically diagnosed back pain, shoulder pain, and spine stiffness. Subjects who slept on medium-firm mattresses also experienced better sleep quality overall and fewer sleep disturbances throughout the night.

Another study, [conducted in Spain in 2003](#) on 313 adults, revealed that the sleepers generally reported less pain on a medium-firm bed versus a firm bed.

The evidence has led [experts to conclude](#) that medium-firm mattresses are better than firm mattresses for easing chronic lower back discomfort and disability.

That's why medium-firm mattresses are the most recommended, especially for back sleepers. People with pre-existing conditions sometimes require a moderately firm sleeping surface in order to heal properly from strains and other injuries. Side sleepers might prefer options in the medium range to better cushion their hips and shoulder.

Still not convinced that a medium-firm mattress is a better choice than one that's rock-hard? Here's an easy way to see how it might feel to sleep on a very firm mattress: Just try placing a plywood board under your mattress, or put your mattress on the floor for the night, [Harvard health experts](#) suggest.

Both experiments will make your bed less cushy, giving you a good approximation of what a very firm mattress might feel like.

In the end, it comes down to what works best for your body and the way you sleep. If your back is an issue, medium-firm mattresses are often a good starting point. You may need to try a few different options to find the best mattress for your back pain though.

That's why it's a good idea to buy from a mattress brand that lets you try the mattress risk-free at home.

Is the best mattress for back pain cool or warm?

[Studies have shown](#) that cooler sleeping experiences facilitate deeper sleep than hotter ones. In fact, a good night's sleep requires a 1°C loss of core body temperature. Deep sleep is synonymous with more restful sleep, so seeking ways to cool your sleeping experience makes sense.

Think of it this way: even if the support is perfect and your spine's pressure points are alleviated with the right mattress, what will happen if you're hot all night? You'll likely toss and turn because you're warm and sweaty, only making your pain worse.

Comfort is a complicated thing. Finding the best mattress for back pain means considering all the factors, from comfort and support to keeping cool.

Find yourself sleeping hot? [Read our guide on keeping cool at night.](#)

Fighting back pain on a budget

Of course, buying a new mattress is a big investment. But if you're not in the market to make a major purchase right now, are there still ways to improve your sleep surface to make it more comfortable?

Can a mattress topper help?

A mattress topper might be the answer you're looking for.

Many chiropractors believe if the sleeper does not own a memory foam bed or if their current bed is too firm, the best thing to do is to lay a 1½ to 2½-inch thick memory foam padding on their sleep surface.

It's best to think of a memory foam topper as a small step towards an improved sleeping experience. But even this small step can have a big impact on back pain, especially if you decide to invest in a high-quality memory foam topper.

High-quality toppers are considerably less expensive than a new mattress. And with proper care, they can last for years. This way, you can get more use out of the mattress you already have—while boosting your comfort level in bed and keeping your back pain at bay.



Make sure the mattress isn't sagging yet or your pain may not be alleviated with a topper.

The drawbacks

Of course, foam toppers are not a foolproof solution. While a mattress pad aids comfort and can help with support, its thin profile doesn't give the sleeper the deep advantages a memory foam or latex mattress does.

Compared with foam toppers, foam mattresses offer more pressureless support, mold and dust mite resistance, and longevity. The breathability and comfort advantages of memory foam make it an overall good choice for pain, and it's likely to be comfortable for most people.

A whole mattress is thick enough to allow the sleeper's body to sink in the proper distance in the right spots. A 1 ½ to 2 ½-inch topper can only do so much.

Quality memory foam or latex foams are hypoallergenic, meaning they're less likely to cause allergic reactions in people. And all natural models of latex and low-VOC memory foams can drastically reduce chemical exposure, which is important for those with sensitivities.

In short, a mattress topper can help make your sleep surface more comfortable, but it won't be as effective as a new memory foam mattress.

Yet if you're hesitant to purchase a new mattress outright, a memory foam mattress topper can be a good stepping stone. Knowing how your body responds to memory foam can inform your mattress decision when the time comes.

One thing to keep in mind: if you choose to use a mattress topper, make sure your current mattress isn't so old that it's sagging. If your mattress bows inward, the topper will likely do the same, and won't be able to provide you with the support to wake up pain-free.

For another sleep option, check out our review of the [best adjustable beds](#).

Fight pain by changing your sleeping position

One thing that can make a huge difference when you suffer back pain is to change your sleeping position. It's a simple step that doesn't cost anything but time and effort, and it can multiply the effects of a new mattress or mattress topper. The better you can train yourself to sleep, with your back relaxed and well-supported, the more you may feel relief from pain.

There is no single best position for back pain because there is no single source of back pain. Different people naturally sleep in different positions, and forcing a side sleeper to switch to their back can be difficult and uncomfortable.

If you switch to a position that better supports your spine but find yourself restless because of the new position, the disruption to your sleep might counter any benefits to your back pain.

Small changes for big results

The good news is that there are some simple solutions that work to adjust your spine's alignment no matter what position you like best. According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), side sleepers should draw up their legs slightly toward their chest and place a pillow between their knees.

For back sleepers, the pillow goes beneath the knees, with the neck supported by another pillow that's flat rather than thick.

Stomach sleepers have the hardest time fighting back pain, since sleeping on the stomach naturally stresses the spine, but placing a pillow beneath the lower abdomen and using a thin pillow (or none at all) under the head can help reduce the negative impact of sleeping on your stomach.

These small changes in sleeping position can make a big difference, especially when they're combined with a new and better sleeping surface. It can be hard to make the change, though, especially since you might naturally toss pillows away and roll back into your old position.

That makes it even more important to invest in a new sleeping experience. When you're ready, you should aim to buy the most responsive and comfortable mattress or mattress topper you can find.

The editorial team at Sleep Junkie recommends the [Amerisleep AS2](#) for that reason. Since the AS2 adapts to your body and rebounds in just four seconds (instead of up to 60 seconds for other mattresses), it can help you feel more comfortable and supported, enabling you to stay in a new position even after you fall asleep.

Back pain is a struggle. But small changes to your sleeping position can make a real difference for some, especially if you choose to invest in the best mattress for back pain.

Looking for the right time to buy? [Check our guide to mattress sales.](#)

What bed will give you the best chance of pain-free days and nights?



It's time to make your pick.

Medium-firm memory foam mattresses assist vertebrae alignment and reduce muscle tension.

These factors, along with affordability, make memory foam the best mattress for a bad back, one that helps soothe and even prevent pain.

It's decision time!

Now that you have the facts about the type of mattress that will help your back stay comfortable, it's time to make your pick.

Remember the key features of the best mattress for back pain: comfort, pressure relief, and temperature. A good night's sleep can be a hard thing to find, so take care to choose a solution that's right for you. The perfect mattress will have you sleeping soundly through the night, instead of tossing and turning or waking up in a sweat.

Of course, you should factor in your own preferences as well as your budget. But Sleep Junkie's recommendation for the best mattress for back pain is [Amerisleep's AS2](#). It's medium-firm feel conforms to your spine's natural curves to keep it properly aligned.

At a price of \$1,199, the Amerisleep AS2 is also far more affordable than the Simmons Beautyrest Legend Preston 17" Luxury Firm Pillow Top. And let's not forget the 4.7/5 average customer rating, higher than both our top Simmons Beautyrest and Sealy Optimum selections.

Pain and stress feed on each other. When sleep gets interrupted, especially if it's because the body is too hot, it can cause discomfort that makes chronic back pain even worse. Pain causes your body to be stressed, which in turn can lead to even poorer sleep, which will worsen the pain. It's a vicious cycle, but it can be broken.

According to the [Mayo Clinic](#), a healthy and comfortable night's sleep is one of the best ways to reduce stress and combat chronic pain. This makes finding the best mattress for back pain even more important.

You spend nearly a third of your life sleeping, so it's important you don't cut corners. Make the decision that will help you sleep more soundly now—and for years to come.

¹ The FDA has determined that Celliant® products are medical devices as defined in section 201(h) of the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act and are general wellness products. Celliant® is determined by the FDA to temporarily promote increased local blood flow at the site of application in healthy individuals. Hologenix, LLC, the maker of Celliant®, states that Celliant® safely converts body heat to infrared energy. This energy penetrates into the muscle and tissue to promote a temporary increase in local blood flow and helps increase comfort and promotes restful sleep.