

- Sleep divorce

**SLEEP
SPECIAL**

Single bed

Noisy, restless partner keeping you awake at night? It might be time to sleep solo. Here's how to reclaim your peaceful pillow time.

BY LIZZ SCHUMER

If your partner keeps you wide-eyed at night by snoring, getting up frequently, stealing the covers or just being generally annoying in bed, it might be time for a 'divorce'. A sleep divorce, that is. What is sleep divorce, you ask? Many couples who interrupt each other's nightly rest have found refuge in sleeping apart, and discovered it helps not only their shut-eye quotient, but their relationship, too.

"As a couple, if you enjoy sleeping together and can do so without one party disrupting the other's sleep, then that is a great outcome. However, it doesn't mean that your relationship is better than a couple who sleeps separately," says Jennifer Adams, author of *Sleeping Apart Not Falling Apart*, who snoozes in a separate room from her husband of 15 years. "Hundreds of thousands of couples are heading to separate rooms each night and enjoying a full life and great relationships, because they get a good night's sleep each night."



SLEEPING ALONE



How sleeping apart helps

Australia's Sleep Health Foundation recommends most adults get seven to nine hours of sleep a night, and missing out can drive a wedge between you and your partner, as well as impact your health. A 2016 study found that sleep issues and relationship problems tend to occur simultaneously, and another study adds that when one partner gets a poor night's sleep because of the other's nighttime disturbances, it results in conflict between them the next day.

When Jennifer was conducting research for her book, she heard from many couples who reported snoring, schedule mismatches, environmental preferences and movement in bed as reasons they decided to sleep apart. And making that choice can really turn a relationship around. "As soon as you're getting the sleep you need, I can almost guarantee the relationship will flourish because you won't be sleep deprived," she says. "Feelings of resentment that build from lying awake each or most nights are destructive for a relationship, and dealing with those feelings of resentment when sleep deprived is not recommended."



Why you need solid rest

It's hard to think of an aspect of your health and wellness that doesn't benefit mightily from restorative sleep, says psychologist Dr Natalie Dautovich. "We progress through multiple stages of sleep during the night, including spending time in deeper stages of sleep," she says. "If your sleep is interrupted numerous times during the night, you may spend more time in the lighter stages of sleep, which are less restorative." A solid night's rest allows your body to replenish its energy and repair cells, tissues and muscles, resulting in you feeling refreshed the next day. ►

SLEEPING ALONE

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Start the conversation the right way

If you'd like to try sleep divorce for yourself, Jennifer says both timing and tone really matter. "Make sure you know why you want to sleep separately and be very clear to your partner that it's not an act of rejection," she advises. "But it's all about focusing on finding an environment that helps you sleep well." Listen carefully to your partner and do your best to put their mind at ease, especially if they express feelings of hurt or rejection. And realise that sleep divorce may not be a one-and-done discussion. Many couples take time and require trial and error to find the best separate sleeping situations for them.



Get your furry friends their own room

Having pets sleep in your room may be comforting for both you and them, but it can rob you of sleep. As hard as it may be, it's important to encourage your pet to sleep elsewhere in another room so you avoid any nighttime interruptions. For this to work, you need to make the other room feel like it's their own. So, play with them there during the day so they become familiar with the space and feel safe to be left alone there during the night.



USE THE CORRECT PILLOW

A pillow should keep your spine supported and prevent stress on your neck and back, explains orthopaedic surgeon Dr Saad Chaudhary. How you sleep matters, so here's what to look for.

● FOR SIDE SLEEPERS

You'll need a thicker pillow than back and stomach sleepers to fill the 10- to 15-centimetre gap between your ear and the mattress, explains clinical psychologist and sleep expert Dr Michael Breus. Your spine should form a straight line "from your nose to your sternum," he advises.

● FOR STOMACH SLEEPERS

Neck pain is a common complaint from those who sleep on their stomach, says Dr Rahul Shah, an orthopaedic spine and neck surgeon. A flatter, firmer pillow will likely be most effective, he says. However, some may prefer a more squishy, soft pillow for general comfort.

● FOR BACK SLEEPERS

"Proper neck support is critical for people who sleep on their back," says Dr Chaudhary. "A pillow should adequately support the shoulders and neck without causing excessive bending forward or upward of the head and neck." Placing a pillow under the knees to allow them to bend slightly is ideal, too, Dr Shah adds.



SLEEP SOOTHERS

Do they work?

Here's what the experts say about sleep-enhancing technology.

SOUND MACHINES

What they are

Bedside units use white noise and nature sounds to mask noises so you can fall asleep more easily.

What we know

Research shows white noise works. Why? "The quieter the environment, the more sensitive your hearing becomes," says Dr Breus. "White noise covers up audible distractions that could delay or interrupt sleep."

Should you try it?

It's certainly worth it, but respiratory and sleep physician Dr Sutapa Mukherjee points out: "Some people like white noise, but others don't like it at all," she says. TRY Marpac Yogasleep Dohm, Dreamegg

SLEEP-TRACKING WEARABLES

What they are

Some fitness trackers monitor your sleep with sensors. They sync to an app that keeps your sleep data – you may see how long you slept, REM-cycle patterns and awakenings.

What we know

"When used every day, it can give you clear trends

of what's happening with your sleep, so I think they definitely play a role," says Dr Mukherjee.

Should you try it?

Sure, but be aware of the limitations. "It's important not to read too much into them in terms of the sleep side, because they're not clinical-grade devices," Dr Mukherjee concludes. TRY Fitbit Charge 3, Apple Watch

SMART MATTRESSES

What they are

Mattresses with embedded sensors are said to capture heart rate, breathing and movement to determine how you sleep. Some even adjust their firmness on each side throughout the night to keep you comfy.

What we know

There's not much research to gauge their accuracy at this stage, so you'll have to do the 'testing'.

Should you try it?

If you're interested only in sleep tracking, buying a mattress is an expensive way to go. But if you need a new mattress anyway, it's certainly worth exploring. TRY Eight Sleep, Sleep Number

Smart app

And then there's diet and fitness tracker MyFitnessPal, which recently launched 'Sleep', an in-app integration to help users keep track of how their food choices impact their sleep. It also offers a free 'Eat Right, Sleep Tight' plan of tips and tricks to address meal timing, hydration and a bedtime routine for a restful night's sleep. Find out more at myfitnesspal.com