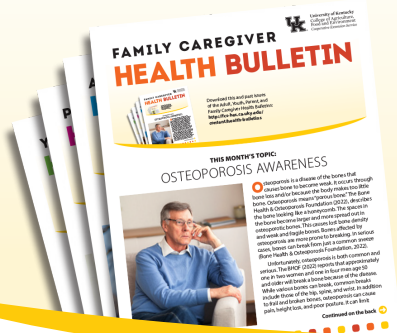




University of Kentucky
College of Agriculture,
Food and Environment
Cooperative Extension Service

FAMILY CAREGIVER HEALTH BULLETIN



FEBRUARY 2023

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THIS MONTH'S TOPIC:

SELECTING SHEETS FOR RESTFUL SLEEP



Quality sleep fulfils our physiological need to recharge and reset our bodies, in turn, keeping us healthy and ready for a full day of activities. Experts recommend a “comfortable” sleeping environment. This includes bedding that meets our individualized needs. The average person needs about eight hours of sleep a day, which adds up to about a third of our life spent in bed. Might as well be comfortable! Sleeping on sheets that enhance our comfort level is well worth a bit of time to explore options and understand the properties of sheets available in today’s market. The “feel” of sheets and how they perform relates to the combination of fiber content, fabric construction, and thread count. You should consider these three factors when choosing sheets we perceive as “comfortable.”

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accommodated
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Yarns made from fibers that are “smoother” and “longer” may create sheets that feel better even at a lower thread count.

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Fiber content

Small hair-like fibers create the yarns (or threads) used in the construction of sheet fabric. Examples are natural cotton fibers and manufactured polyester fibers, each with distinct properties that affect comfort. Cotton fibers can be processed to create smooth yarns with varied fineness that are generally soft and breathable. Polyester fibers contribute durability and easy care. However, sheets with a high polyester content may trap more body heat. Bamboo fibers are processed into rayon and can have comfort properties similar to cotton. “Microfiber” refers to polyester, nylon, or rayon (bamboo) fibers that are man-made to be finer than human hair, enabling them to produce a sheet that can feel soft and “silky.”

Fabric construction

Sheet fabric is commonly woven using a percale weave or sateen weave. This refers to the sequence in which the yarns are interlaced together. Yarns in a percale weave are aligned at right angles in a one-over, one-under (plain) pattern normally resulting in sheets with a tight weave and a crisp feel. A sateen weave is created when yarns “float” over each other in a three-over, one-under pattern. Sateen sheets feel smooth and silky and are less likely to wrinkle. However, their looser weave structure makes them more prone to snags. These weaves can use yarns of any fiber content, including fibers blended together (e.g., cotton and polyester). Cozy flannel sheets are made by brushing the surface of plain weave fabric. Sheets that stretch and feel like a t-shirt are constructed with looped, jersey knit yarns.

Thread count

The number of yarns that are woven (or interlaced) “up and down” and “side to side” within a square inch of fabric is the thread count. For example, sheets with a “300 Thread Count” may have an average of 150 yarns per inch in the up and down (warp) direction, and 150 yarns per inch in the side to side (weft) direction. Many consumers consider

that a “higher thread count” equates to a softer, nicer set of sheets. However, this is not always the case. The yarn quality (including the yarn size) has more impact on the feel of the sheets. Yarns made from fibers that are “smoother” and “longer” may feel more luxurious, creating sheets that feel better even at a lower thread count. A mid-range thread count of about 350 is good place to start; keeping in mind that a lower thread count may be more breathable.

Caring for sheets

Wash sheets at least every two weeks, or more frequently if the sleeper tends to sweat at night. For best results, do not launder sheets with towels or other items of different fabric weights. The washer and dryer will perform better if sheets and pillowcases are washed separately from other items. Sheets help keep mattresses and pillows clean, but for added protection and comfort, use a mattress pad and pillow protectors. Don’t forget to wash those, too. Waterproof mattress pads are very practical when bed wetting is a concern. It’s nice to have at least one set of sheets for cooler weather and a set for warmer weather. Or having at least one extra set (per mattress size) is a good idea in case you need to change the sheets right away.

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