



SLEEPING APART NOT FALLING APART

How to get a good night's sleep *and*
keep your relationship alive

JENNIFER ADAMS

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The truth about bed sharing

'Laugh and the world laughs with you, snore and you sleep alone.'

- *Anthony Burgess*

A bed has many uses. It's a place to read, throw your clothes, watch television, chat on the phone, kiss and cuddle, have sex, jump up and down, cry and feel sad. However creatively we may choose to use a bed though, there's no denying that its main use is for sleeping. And as discussed in the last chapter, the somewhat prosaic activity of sleeping is an essential daily, human activity. So, inevitably we all retire to the bedroom to get our rest.

If you are part of a couple, heading to the bedroom each night to sleep may, or may not, fill you with a sense of calm and restfulness. Not to labour a point, but falling in love with a person does not guarantee a full complement of items on the compatibility tick list. The laws of attraction that send us into the arms of another to mate don't consider a raft of incompatibilities that can bite us after the heady glow of early lust wears off.

The 2012 study by the Central Queensland University mentioned earlier found a partner in your bed is more disruptive to sleep than any other noise. In the study, 57.6 per cent respondents indicated that they slept with a partner, and,

of these, 34.5 per cent indicated that their partner disturbed them while getting into bed. Forty four per cent stated that their partner disturbed them by tossing and turning, and 58.5 per cent said that their partner's snoring disturbed their sleep. Over 48 per cent said their partner disturbed them by getting up to go to the bathroom at night; 10.1 per cent reported that their sleep was disturbed by their partner getting up to go to the kitchen; 8.1 per cent of respondents were disturbed by their partner answering phone calls; and 35.9 per cent had been disturbed by a partner getting up to go to work.

Yet despite all the potential and known problems that go hand-in-hand with the activity, we keep slipping between the sheets with each other with an infallible optimism.

There are good and bad aspects to bed sharing. The critical determinant is the needs and wants of each individual and how determined that individual is to have those needs and wants met. Bedtime behaviours are in themselves mundane. But add in the human elements of temperament, emotion, power plays, relationship dynamics, traditions, morals, pride, changing attitudes, physical health and personality and a set of mundane behaviours can go from being banal to a battlefield.

As discussed, there is the expectation of couples (especially in most Western cultures) who marry or choose to live together that part of the deal of sharing your life with each other includes sharing a bed.

You are a married couple, you are a partnership and sleeping together is a symbol of that.

Amelia, 41, mother of two, married 12 years

It's a social thing that you sleep together; you're in the same room. Loving parents sleep in the same room – not separate rooms.

Anne, 44, senior manager, married 20 years

Think when you find your soulmate you go with the flow – come on you are married share a bed – not difficult. (sic)

Anonymous, www.mamamia.com.au

Being married for the first time at 44 meant it took me a while to adjust to sleeping with someone after a long time of being single and having the whole bed to myself. Despite this, I never considered not sharing a bed – for me, being married meant that as a couple we would share a bed together.

Sarah, 52, education officer, married 8 years

When my friends came out from the States in the 1990s and built a house with separate rooms, I thought their marriage was over. Word got around our friendship group and everyone talked about it and thought the same thing.

Von, 72, married 55 years

My emotional side argues that ‘It’s not normal if you don’t sleep next to your husband. You have to make it work’ and my logical side screams ‘Are you crazy? You need proper sleep! If that means sleeping separately then so be it!’

Emily, 30, international flight attendant, married 1 year

I think there’s something wrong. Her parents aren’t sleeping in the same bed anymore.

Gretchen Wieners, *Mean Girls*

The good stuff

I don’t deny that sharing a bed with another person provides a distinct level of intimacy to a relationship that’s hard to replicate. The rituals associated with sharing a space each night, getting ready for bed, spending time alone in the sanctity of a bedroom and lying next to someone – whether you snuggle or barely touch – are part of a relationship that some couples simply could not live without.

I find shared sleep deeply sexy; often more so than making love. It's where true love lies, beyond words, beyond sex.

Nikki Gemmel, *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, 21-22 January 2012

Sharing a bed with my wife Sarah gives me a sense of completeness, togetherness and closeness. As we drift off to sleep together each night, I am reassured that all is well with the world.

Thomas, 63, organisational consultant, married 8 years

Physical contact with another human can be calming and comforting in itself and is often sought through sharing a bed and the rhythm of sleep. Many couples speak of the intimacy that bed sharing brings. This daily act can often be both a personal and public symbol of the closeness a couple shares – often because sleeping together signifies a closer liaison.

I enjoy the intimacy of sleeping with my partner. I sometimes like to cuddle up to her and she is receptive although she may be asleep. This behaviour is reciprocal. Sometimes we hold hands, sometimes just rest a hand on each other.

Chris, 51, builder, with partner for 3 years

I love ending the day next to my husband. No matter what's happened in the day ... our bed is our haven when there's just the two of us. We can share the day, plan the next day, console and cajole. We can be tender and touch or fall asleep from exhaustion with very little said but with the knowledge that we share the bed, an arm's length away and tomorrow another day.

Alana, 60, personal assistant, married 32 years

There is a social aspect to bed sharing that many couples enjoy and choose to prioritise over disrupted sleep. In fact, some may view sleeping with another person – be it a partner, child or friend – as a social event in itself. I know that there are many

people who simply like sharing a bed with their partner. The cuddling and chatting, and camaraderie of hopping into this small comfy space each night has a romantic allure and can be wonderful to share with another.

Retiring to bed each night can provide the opportunity to spend quiet time together to debrief on the day, discuss topics you may not want to bring up in front of children, have a serious conversation with your partner on a personal issue, or lie quietly next to each other in that comfortable silence couples develop over time and a life shared together. In an increasingly busy lifestyle, this may be the only time when couples find the time to be alone with the other to meet a myriad of needs.

My wife and I are so busy in our lives, that sleeping together is often the only place we can spend time alone together. Just knowing that I can at least touch her hand and lie next to her is all I need to reconnect each day. I couldn't live without it.

Tony, 47, IT consultancy business development manager, married 25 years

I cherish my time in bed with my partner. I love our little chats before we fall asleep. I love his snuggles in the middle of the night. To the point where I can't sleep if he's not in bed with me.

Trina, www.mamamia.com.au

The one thing I look forward to at the end of each day is the brief moment, before we go to sleep, when I get to lay my head on my husband's chest and hear his heart beating. We don't talk. But just that brief connection means so much to me.

Sleeping together gives us the chance for regular intimacy such as midnight discussions about topics that worry us. Sometimes you can talk about things so much easier when lying next to one another in the dark. Quite often we will hold hands while we are talking about things that worry us and this is reassuring.

Cass, www.villainouscompany.com

Sleeping with another person may also be an activity that is habitual. Individuals who slept with siblings in a bed or a room as they were growing up may equate safety and security with having another person in close proximity during sleep. There is a gender ideology that women need the protection of men, and this protection may extend to bed sharing.

*I actually sleep *better* with my partner in the bed. I don't think he makes a physical difference, but there's something comforting about him being there. I find it really hard to sleep by myself now, if I'm staying at my parents' or overnight at a party. I almost never wake up refreshed if I've slept alone.*

Shannon, www.mamamia.com.au

I always go to bed well before my partner so I fall asleep fine by myself, but if he's away and I know he's not coming to bed that night, I can't get to sleep at all! I have to have the tv on in the other room, I hate sleeping when there's no-one else in the house.

Alena, www.mamamia.com.au

Paul Rosenblatt, author of *Two in Bed: the Social System of Couple Bed Sharing*, says that the cited benefits of sleeping with another are either person-focused, such as warmth, sense of safety and companionship, or couple-focused, such as intimacy, shared experiences and reaffirming the couple's commitment. For those individuals who need a sense of safety security and companionship, sharing a bed can provide this and create an environment conducive to a good night's rest.

So while there is much that is good, even great, about sleeping with another, there are aspects of the practice that leave a lot to be desired. As sleeping is such a fundamental human need, honestly examining the unpleasant realities of sleep is as important as enjoying the upside.

The bad stuff

Being in close physical contact with any person, in any setting, for an extended period of time inevitably creates issues. Lying next to the same person night after night can be a breeding ground for all that can be unpleasant between two people. And while there are behaviours and habits our partners have that we can learn to live with, such as leaving the lid off the sauce bottle, or not making the bed first thing in the morning, a 1999 study by the Mayo Clinic found that people don't automatically adjust to sleep disturbances.

Even though Paul Rosenblatt, encourages couples to learn to sleep together, he notes the following about sharing a bed: 'Sleeping together is an achievement of coordination on many dimensions – where to locate one's head, body, arms and legs, where to put one's pillow, how to relate to the blankets, when to talk and not talk, when to touch the other and when not, how to touch the other, what ways of expressing displeasure with the other are acceptable and work, how free one is to toss and turn, what to do when the other makes noise, what to do and not do if one awakens during the night.'

It all sounds like such hard work, doesn't it?

And while each couple faces its own particular proximity issues, there do appear to be some clear winners in the litany of complaints from bed sharers. I'm going to look at the 'bad' parts of bed sharing in two categories. First, there are the actual *in-bed* bed behaviours, and then there are the habits and behaviours *around* going to bed.

Snoring

Snoring is by far the most common reason why one partner will disturb the other's sleep. And, sorry guys, but it does tend to be men who are most guilty on this charge. The National

Sleep Foundation of America supports this stain on your good characters.

Persons most at risk are males and those who are overweight, but snoring is a problem of both genders, although it is possible that women do not present with this complaint as frequently as men.

The physical and medical reasons for snoring are complex and varied. They range from having one too many alcoholic drinks to life-threatening conditions such as sleep apnoea. So whether it's the man or the woman snoring in bed, it's a very common problem and it keeps a lot of people awake. Snoring also becomes more prevalent and louder as we age. And that's for both men and women. So if you are smugly reading this and have not yet reached your forties – it's all ahead of you.

I hated my husband because of his snoring. I hated that he could keep me awake and not even know he was doing it. When I would kick him and say 'Please stop snoring' he would say, 'I'm not snoring – what are you talking about?' and then it would be my problem and I would be furious with him. We could not have stayed in the same bed together because I really resented him for it. I resented the way he reacted. He didn't wake up and say 'I'm really sorry keeping you awake' he would wake up and say 'Stop kicking me – why are you kicking me?' and then resent me.

Frances, 40, mother of 3, married 10 years

When my husband snores I want to say 'go away you sound like a troll'. I think snoring is one of the most unattractive things a person can do. To me, it's a hideous sound and there's nothing appealing about someone who snores. So if I can't hear his snoring he looks much nicer and much more appealing to me.

Rebecca, 47, counsellor, married 20 years

My snoring simply became an issue for us. John tried ear plugs, but he couldn't wear them for more than three nights in a row and I felt bad that he had to.

May, 66, retired, married 40 years

I sleep in a separate room from my partner of more than 20 years because of his snoring. We downloaded an app that measures decibels and his snoring was at the same sound level as a food processor makes grinding nuts!

Anonymous, www.mamamia.com.au

My father's snoring eventually ended our family holidays in caravans. My brother and I would be up in the annexe at 2 am playing cards because Dad's snoring was as loud as a train.

Kate, 46, lawyer, married 12 years

My mother is renowned for her snoring. To the point where I can only describe it as a whipper snipper next to you! And she snores no matter what, front, back and sides! My father's only saving grace is he falls asleep really quickly and easily so it's usually not a problem.

Trina, www.mamamia.com.au

Unfortunately, snoring is something over which we have little control. While intermittent snoring can be controlled through a few less beers or wines, for many people it is embarrassing and a source of frustration. It is a pity that an unintended behaviour can have such a big impact on so many couple's lives. But I must confess that when I hear people tell of years of no sleep due to a snoring partner, I am genuinely mystified that they have done nothing to address the situation and continue to complain of no sleep.

While your partner may only emit a gentle purr that disturbs you occasionally, the voracity with which some people snore can be quite alarming. The average snorer emits a noise level

of 50 decibels. This is equivalent to the noise generated by a normal conversation at home or a large electrical transformer 100 feet away. *The Guinness Book of Records* reports Koere Walkert from Sweden as one of the loudest snorers. Measured at 93 decibels on 24 May, 1993, his snoring is as loud as a belt sander. However, Walkert is a lightweight compared to Jenny Chapman in Britain, who was recorded snoring at 111.6 decibels at a snoring boot camp in 2009. This puts her as just a little louder than a chain saw, not quite as loud as a hammer drill, but still 8 decibels louder than a low-flying jet.

As a guide, anything over 70 decibels is when hearing can start to be damaged – so spare a thought for Jenny Chapman’s husband. Sensibly though, he does often sleep in another room, with both bedroom doors shut and sometimes with his head under a pillow.

And fortunately for Jenny, she wasn’t married to John Wesley Hardin. An outlaw who lived in America in the late 1800s, Hardin reportedly shot a sleeping stranger in the room next to him because his snoring was keeping Hardin awake. While many of us may have thought of such extreme action as well, fortunately for thousands of snorting and snuffling partners we have exercised far greater restraint.

Movement

Movement in bed can range from innocent repositioning for comfort, through to restless leg syndrome and flailing limbs that can turn the bed into a nightly replay of a good old-fashioned gladiator epic. Some people find they have partnered with a ‘floundering whale’ who flops around the bed all night, taking the sheets and blankets with them, oblivious to the innocent soul shivering on the other side, fuming quietly or whimpering sadly.

The reality is that sleeping involves movement, especially during the light sleep stages. We all change sleeping position around 20 times a night but Professor Jim Horne, director of Loughborough University's Sleep Research Centre, notes that men seem to shift around more than women. In an experiment conducted at the centre, movement sensors placed on men and women found that men move around twice as much in the night. This fact may help settle some arguments about the mystery of bedclothes that go awry on a nightly basis.

And while innocent and simple movement might just be annoying, sharing a bed with a 'human windmill' can be life threatening. There are documented cases of women who have bruised breasts from being rolled on during sleep. Ouch!

I like a lot of personal space. I like to sleep in different positions. On my back, on my tummy, arms behind my head, arms to my side, arms straight up like a soldier (rarely, but I like to keep my options open), legs splayed, knees drawn up to my chest, hanging from the chandelier wearing bunny ears and a tail (okay, so that one is my husband's fantasy). I don't like to be restricted in my movements by anyone pushing my limbs out of the way when I fancy a good stretch.

Kerri, 44, author and blogger, with husband 20 years

My husband and I regularly, accidentally punch or elbow each other in the face at night. We have a queen size but I think we need to upsize to avoid injury.

littlemisschloe, www.mamamia.com.au

Where do I begin? I have been elbowed and kicked more times than I can remember, had his arm 'thud' on me as he turns over, and pushed with such force that I am jolted out of sleep with such a startle I find it hard to get back to sleep sometimes. I know he doesn't mean to do it and is always apologetic, but I

often wonder if it would be a legal reason to justifiably let me hurt him.

Chloe, 32, accountant

Night-time comfort breaks

Another common movement during the night is one partner getting up to go to the toilet. The increase of ensuite bathrooms in modern houses mean that not only is there disruption in the act of getting out of bed, there can also be some disturbingly audible proof of the activity. For men sharing a bed with a pregnant woman, frequent toilet trips during the night – while good training for the sleeplessness to come – can be equally as disturbing.

While I understand that my husband needs to go to the toilet during the night, must the activity involve the broken waterfall effect, a couple of farts and that much sighing? It's always been a bone of contention between us. He won't even shut the door – 'it takes too much time'.

Sue, 48, married 12 years

I know it's wrong to be angry about things related to pregnancy, but my wife would go to the toilet about 5–6 times a night in the last couple of months of her pregnancy. I was too frightened to tell her that it was really disturbing my sleep. I just drank a lot of coffee at work. It wasn't a great time.

Simon, 43, IT manager

About 6 months into my pregnancy I just moved out into the other room. That way I could spread out, toss and turn and go to the toilet as many times as I needed.

daisy123, www.mamamia.com.au

Temperature

The different preferences in sleeping temperature is another way to heat things up in the bedroom, whether talking about bed coverings, breezes through an open window or air conditioning.

Research suggests that men don't perceive temperature as sensitively as women, which is why they feel warmer. One theory is that women tend to have more blood circulating around their core organs, and less around their extremities such as their hands and feet, which are the body's temperature sensors.

Hands up, those ladies who have slipped their cold feet or hands on to body parts of their male partner to warm them? I know I do it in winter (to much loud protest) when I slip in to my husband's bed for a cuddle before heading to my bed for the night. Similarly, hands up, guys who hate it when your female partner tries to suck the warmth from you with their cold hands or feet? And girls, who hasn't had a bit of a giggle when angling your cold bottom into your partner's warm embrace for a quick spoon before you slip off to sleep? Yes, it's all good fun, until one of you feels that you are being used as a human water bottle.

Typically, women prefer their sleeping environment to be warmer than men. This is backed up by Paul Rosenblatt's research; he found that 75 per cent of the heterosexual couples he interviewed reported that when one of them was warmer than the other, it was usually the man. But not always. A woman can be the partner generating the most heat. A 2001 study found that women's body temperature rises by as much as one degree towards the end of their menstrual cycle. Hormonal changes during pregnancy and menopause can also lead to a raised temperature.

My husband and I have had trouble sleeping together. I tend to sleep 'hot' and prefer a thinner blanket, while he sleeps 'cold' and likes a giant quilt. It took two and a half years, but we

realised along the way that instead of a nightly debate over whose favourite blanket we would use, we would each cram our own onto the bed. We no longer have the ‘your blanket makes me too hot/cold’ discussion in the morning.

Kate, www.mamamia.com.au

My wife requires more warmth in the bed. She needs a doona most nights to sleep under but I want to toss it off. Each person requires their own comfort level.

Bruce, 68, married 3 years

I was undergoing chemotherapy and radiation and became impossible to sleep with. My changes in body temperature became a big issue for us both and part of the raft of reasons we moved to separate beds.

Brooke, 52, education professional, married 30 years

My husband likes to be very scientific about things. So when I reach for an extra blanket, wriggle my icy feet and complain ‘it’s cold ...’ he’ll look at the thermometer he has nearby for just such occasions and tell me that it’s not cold, because it’s 20 degrees in the bedroom. Different people just feel the cold differently. I can see that from my kids – one cocooned under a mound of blankets, the other spreadeagled on top of the sheets. When you are sharing a bed though, that can be tricky. I have surrendered any notion of enjoying an electric blanket. He tolerates the doona in winter, so long as most of the feathers have been distributed away from him. Little by little, we have reached an accommodation about the arrangement of blankets – and the desirability of bed socks – even though I know we will never agree on whether it is ‘cold’.

Kate, 46, lawyer, married 12 years

Breathing

Whether we are asleep or awake, respiration just keeps on happening. Like snoring, this is an uncontrollable behaviour as we don't know that our mouth falls open after we fall asleep. However, as the wee hours of the morning approach, the wafting smell or the raspy sound of a loved one's breath are less than welcome.

After 15 years and three kids together a queen bed just doesn't cut it, when it is time to sleep I need my space! I have to face away from my hubby while sleeping, I hate being breathed on! I have actually said to my hubby that things would be a lot better if he didn't breathe overnight! Daytime breathing only!

Sarah, www.mamamia.com.au

I hate, hate, hate being breathed on! I tell Mr W he is like a dragon breathing on my neck and the sound is like a plane taking off in my ear!

Whippersnapper, www.mamamia.com.au

A king sized bed has made the sleeping experience better. In our queen sized bed I always woke up with a cricked neck from sleeping facing away from him as I hate being breathed on in the night.

Anonymous, www.mamamia.com.au

Like snoring, poking and prodding might make the problem of a partner breathing in your direction stop, but just like snoring, for how long? I do wonder if Darth Vader ever shared a bed with a partner?

Children and pets

Those who follow through on the laws of attractions and produce children often face additional demands on their bed real estate. Not only do you have to share with your loved one,

you may have to share your minimal and prized space with some little loved ones as well.

For some, bed space may progress from a small crib, to a bigger cot, to a single bed, to a double or queen bed – all by yourself. Then you start sleeping with your partner and your bed space is halved, then the children come along and you find yourself gripping on for dear life to the last foot of space at the edge of the mattress as the toe nails of your toddler rake your calves.

The balancing act of trying to allow everyone in a family to get enough sleep often forces the hand of many parents who give in and let children share their bed.

After years of bed hopping to accommodate our two children who would not spend a full night in their own bed, we gave in and just started sleeping with one child in our bed and one of us in the spare bed in their room. It's been close to 10 years now and even after recently paying them \$5 a night to sleep in their own bed, after about four weeks, the eldest boy started coming through to our room again, so we are back to sleeping apart.

Michael and Liza, 41 and 39, married 10 years

My partner and I have been together 8 years and slept in separate rooms for about 3 years now. I used to and probably still would love sleeping with him but since we have had kids, 2 boys within 15 months that both co-sleep, I've shifted to the spare room. We have a king-sized bed but I was still constantly annoyed and as a result, waking up shirty too. He loves the kids in the bed and it honestly doesn't bother him if he is woken up by a foot in the face or a cry for a cup of milk. I used to feel guilty but now I don't, I realise sometimes you gotta do what you gotta do!

Lola, www.mamamia.com

The one positive aspect of this shared-sleeping problem is that it has an end point. Most parents can be confident that they won't have to co-sleep with, or make room in their bed for, their teenager. At least, one hopes not.

There are people who could easily substitute 'pet' for 'child'. In fact, I'll bet there are some who have done it already. Some of us are more than happy to share our beds each night with a furry creature but others think that any animal in the bed is a non-negotiable 'no'.

So what happens when you meet your soulmate, and the whirlwind romance leads you to the bedroom to find that Fluffy gets to sleep in the middle of the bed, and then at the bottom, and then in the middle again, and then back to the bottom each night? Because humans can become terribly attached to their animals, this issue can be as significant as the arguments for or against children sleeping in bed.

To cuddle or not to cuddle

Is your idea of sleeping heaven when your partner takes you in their arms and holds you tight through the night until dawn's rays slip through the curtains the next morning? Or does this scenario fill with you dread, make your hands shake wildly at your side, and make you feel icky and want to say 'ewwwwww'?

Just like we have different tolerance levels about activities such as holding hands and cuddling and kissing in public, some of us don't want to be held in a loving embrace all night. Because men generally fall asleep faster, women can be left trapped under a well-meaning but vice-like arm. There is also the problem of ongoing physical contact creating sweaty bodies that are neither pleasant to feel or smell, nor great for the sheets.

Spooning your loved one as you succumb to blissful slumber makes for a great visual in the movies, but doesn't really

accommodate the human need for changing positions as we cycle through our sleep patterns every night.

I'm at the start of trying to convince a newish boyfriend that sleeping separately is okay. Yes, I love the snuggling and the cuddling, but when it's time to sleep I really dislike being touched. I'm a light sleeper and have rheumatoid arthritis so it's hard for me to get comfortable enough to sleep well at the best of times. Having a boyfriend who feels the constant need to be touching me somehow rather complicates things. It's a really hard topic to discuss with him without feeling like I'm being cold or mean!

Em, www.mamamia.com.au

I like to cuddle up to my wife's back as we fall asleep together – I think it's called spooning. After enjoying this for about 5 minutes, I face reality, roll over, and arrange my 3 pillows the way I need them so I can sleep comfortably.

Max, 43, company director, married 18 years

Other in-bed sleeping problems

While I could fill a good portion of this book with what can go wrong when lying in a bed next to another, I'll leave the discussion there and leave you with a list of further complications that can be found between the sheets. The list is not definitive, which is why there are some spaces at the bottom to fill in the ones you think I've missed.

- The size of the bed
- The firmness of the bed
- Who gets to sleep on which side of the bed
- Sheet textures
- Amount and size of pillows

- Different sleep positions
- Teeth grinding
- Sweating
- Getting up in the middle of the night (not just for the toilet)
- Waking from dreams and nightmares
- Going to bed angry
- Sleep walking
- Sleep talking
- Insomnia
- Illness – temporary or long term
- _____
- _____
- _____

As well as nightly tussles when in the bed, there are also the tussles that happen before you even reach the bed or turn out the light.

As outlined in the last chapter, sleeping needs differ from person to person. If you are lucky enough to share similar sleeping needs in regards to getting ready to sleep, the time you go to bed and how long you need to sleep, then well done. However, the reality for many is that they have different bedroom behaviours that can wear down a once happily-shared activity.

Preparing to sleep

Human behaviour is swathed in habit and ritual. Learned behaviours that are replayed consciously, or that happen without much thought at all, guide us through each day, week, month and year. When it comes to going to bed, having a ritual

or routine is something that begins when we are babies and don't have the slightest idea of the conditioning to which we are being exposed. Cultural factors vary, but I am sure many of you have experienced the practice of children having a set bedtime routine that involves a bath, a story reading and then being tucked into bed nice and early. This traditional approach to our early sleeping behaviour is often the origin of the rituals we adopt as we grow older, which leads me to the first, very common habit that people have when it comes to going to bed – reading before sleeping.

Similar to snoring, to read or not to read before sleep is a common battle fought out in beds across the world. The Big Sleep Survey conducted in 2010 in Australia, with over 12,000 people participating, found that 40 per cent of people like to read when they go to bed, while the Central Queensland University study reported that 59.7 per cent of people like to read in bed. Both results are significant. Reading in bed is a disruptive activity (for the sleeping party) that involves having a light on as well as movement and sound (from the page turning).

Having a room of one's own was a revelation. First, there was the realisation that I could read as long as I wanted, even with the main light on if I so desired. I've always read in bed – right from the days when I used to hide a flashlight under my pillow so I could continue after my mother had pronounced: 'Lights out.' But during the years of sharing a bed with David, this habit had become one of our great bones of contention: 'Can't you turn off the light? I can't sleep.' Even a specially purchased, tiny light that hooked over the cover of the book was too much for him. He would complain he couldn't sleep, and when I hid it over the edge of the bed, ruining my eyesight in the gloom, he would whine, 'But I can hear you turning the pages!' But then he liked to fall asleep with the radio on, and you can't

concentrate on your own novel when Radio 4's 'Book at Bedtime' is burbling in the background. Now, though, I can do as I please.

Dame Jenni Murray, British journalist and broadcaster for *The Guardian*

My husband is a shift worker, which is an issue. Being an 'owl' I never felt that I could go in to my bedroom and feel free to do anything. No activity with noise was allowed and no reading could happen because there was to be no light in the room. I missed reading in bed.

Anne, 44, senior manager, married 20 years

Neil is a reader and I can't sleep with the light on. When he would read all night because he couldn't sleep, I would go to the spare room. Now though, he will mostly go to the spare room to read as he needs to, to help him get back to sleep.

Ann, 46, HR professional, married 19 years

As we got older and I became more liberated, I thought why should I have to go to bed when he wants to go and why should I have to turn the lights off when he wants to go to sleep. If I wanted to continue to read he would complain about the light from my table light keeping him awake.

Von, 72, married 55 years

Watching television in bed is another activity that some find relaxing and soporific, and others find anything but. A 2009 study of 21,475 adults by the Division of Sleep and Chronobiology at the University of Pennsylvania found that television viewing is the most dominant pre-sleep activity, accounting for almost 50 per cent of pre-bedtime, a statistic which was repeated in the Central Queensland University study. The topic even featured prominently in the movie *Sex in the City 2*: Carrie was most unhappy when Big decided to install a television in the bedroom of their New York apartment.

Television creates light and sound and causes similar problems to reading between couples.

I will never cease to be amazed at how my wife's interest in crappy TV increases in direct proportion to how late at night it is. She will be fighting to stay awake, but intent on getting to the end of another 'Celebrity Something' show no matter what the cost is next morning. The hum of the TV keeps me awake in itself, even without any volume. I will sometimes fall asleep on the couch just to avoid watching the rubbish. It really annoys me but she insists it helps her sleep. I think it just helps her stay awake.

Wilson, 43, married 15 years

TV had a great bearing on us moving to separate rooms. Margaret had a TV in the bedroom and I hated it. Absolutely detested it. Why? When I go to bed I go to bed to sleep. If I want to watch TV I can do it in the lounge room. When I wanted to go to sleep Margaret would have to turn the TV off and go out to the lounge room to continue watching her show. And then she would disturb me when she came back to bed.

John, 58, building contractor, married 30 years

My husband watches TV to wind down and fall asleep. The problem was that he would lie on the couch to watch TV, fall asleep, but when he woke up, turned the TV off and walked down the hall to come to bed, he would be too awake to fall asleep again. He just stays on the couch now.

Suzette, 40, administrative assistant, married 17 years

Then there are those who can't face eight hours of slumber without nourishment and take a snack to eat and/or drink when they hop in to bed. Despite the risk of crumbs or drips and drops of food in the bed and on the bedclothes, an American study found 32 per cent of people polled take meals and snacks to bed.

My husband eats in bed, which I cannot stand. He leaves plates and bowls and water bottles by the bed. I love lovely linen and every time I bought new linen it would have chocolate ice cream or chocolate on it, which would never come out. I don't have that now, because he is eating in his bed, in his room.

Anne, 44, senior manager, married 20 years

Staying connected

Developments in contemporary living create new challenges for the modern couple; an array of devices such as iPads, laptops, notebooks, iPhones, Galaxies, and Kindles are now a feature of pre-sleep activity. For some couples, it's not just pre-sleep either, but also during the night and first thing in the morning. Wireless networks are commonplace in homes and have given technology addicts the ability to be online anywhere and anytime.

Almost a third of participants in the 2010 Australian Big Sleep Survey keep a mobile phone in the bedroom at night, with TVs, laptops, iPods and radios found in roughly 15 per cent of bedrooms. In 2011, Ikea conducted a study of two million people and found that 22 per cent admitted to using a computer in bed (the Central Queensland University study reported 77.9 per cent of respondents said they used a computer in bed).

Compelling and arguably important reasons such as checking emails, Facebook and Twitter updates, financial information and sport results are the most common reasons for justifying the need to take a device to bed. And it's not just the fact that your partner is more interested in the screen than you, it's the audible detritus that comes with the electronica.

My husband has headphones listening to music when I am trying to sleep. I can still hear the music and it drives me nuts.

(I think it is very anti-social for him to have headphones in bed!)

Anonymous, www.mamamia.com.au

The iPad is the third person in our relationship. Morning, noon and night my partner is emailing friends, work colleagues and all the other stuff like Facebook and the web. He knows I don't like the iPad being used in bed, but thankfully I mostly fall asleep and it doesn't disturb me.

Pete, 32, banking professional

Just as books create noise when pages are turned, devices will ring and beep with alerts; click when keyboards are used, and throw out a luminous glow that can light up a room just as much as a bedside light. I enjoy being able to sit in bed and use my laptop when needed, and I often watch videos on my iPhone. My husband is very attached to his iPad and seeing him lying in bed using it last thing at night and first thing in the morning is not uncommon.

If this is the area that troubles you most, there is a comprehensive study available that was done by the Sleep Foundation in America in 2011 about devices in the bedroom.

Light and sound

A dark, quiet room is the Gold Standard for sleeping. How quiet is quiet though? And how dark is dark? The earlier chapter on the science of sleep touched on the answer for why we prefer a dark environment, but it's a little bit of a 'chicken and egg' question. As melatonin is produced in the body when it gets dark, this means that we tend to sleep when it's dark; and we also need darkness to produce the melatonin to make us sleepy. Prior to the invention of electricity, artificial light didn't confuse our melatonin production so more people retired to bed earlier. Also, without electricity there weren't as many nighttime

activities anyway, so going to bed was the preferred option for most people.

A recent US study found that sleeping in a room with too much light can cause depression. Scientists that conducted the study found that ‘even just the glow from leaving the television on while you sleep can be enough to trigger the effect and a lack of darkness during sleeping hours can cause changes to the brain and depressive symptoms’. There are people who do not like a totally dark room, possibly the result of having a night light as a child, and equally, there are those who cannot bear even a sliver of light disturbing their sleep.

Noise in the bedroom can take many forms. I have already touched on issues such as noise from the turning of a page and noise from electronic devices. However, on the opposite end of the spectrum, there are people who like to have constant noise while they sleep. A commonly sought noise is the constant hum of an air conditioner or a fan. For some, this is more than just a temperature issue, it’s that they can’t sleep without some type of noise in the bedroom – they cannot ‘do’ quiet. Our individuality dictates the degrees of dark and quiet we need to create our optimal sleeping environment.

While not my story, I clearly remember a school friend’s sister who slept with clocks in her room. We’re not talking a couple: if memory serves, it was over 20. All clocks were ticking clocks and I was always fascinated by how she could possibly sleep at night. Being a light sleeper, it has been a story that has stayed with me. As she was unmarried at the time I knew her, I used to think about what her husband would say and do when she eventually married. I still do.

Holly, 33, British public servant

I cannot sleep without the fan on in the room. It’s not only the feeling of the air moving over my body, but the constant hum

that it makes. For me, that 'hum' drowns out any other noise that might keep me awake.

Brian, 47, transport worker, married 22 years

Up and go

How do you like to be woken in the morning? By a pair of twittering bluebirds gently rousing you from your night of slumber with their songs? Or by the shattering blast of a hard rock radio station so that you know for sure you are going to stay awake? Are you a serial snoozer who has to hit that button for another 10 minutes of sleep so many times that you struggle to make the bus each day? Or are you a lark who went to bed so early that dawn's first light woke you and allowed you to pop out for a quick half hour run before most of us even realised it was day?

How we are woken can impact on our mood and attitude right from the second we open our eyes. As noted, being woken at the wrong time in your sleep cycle can leave you feeling out of sorts and struggling to get your eyes open and find your nice inner person. If you've ever been accused of 'getting out of bed on the wrong side', it could be attributed to when you were woken rather than where you were in the bed.

If a couple retire to bed at different times, but wake at the same time, the nature of sleep cycles adds an additional level of complexity to sleeping together. If one of the couple is in the middle of a deep sleep cycle when awakened, they may find it difficult to adjust immediately and feel groggy and disoriented for several minutes. This disorientation could be the reason why you're getting out of bed on the wrong side!

When my alarm goes off in the morning sometimes, it takes me forever to get my act together. I call it 'cotton wool brain', but it can sometimes last all morning. A couple of times that I have

been up early to take people to the airport, I have had to go back home and sleep more because I know I haven't actually woken up yet. I can drive and talk and do all that, but I'm not 100%.

Lulu, 42, legal professional, married 6 years

Similarly, being woken by a loud, unpleasant sound might just really annoy you, irrespective of which sleep cycle you are in.

My ex-boyfriend Brent wanted the radio alarm clock tuned to a hard rock radio station. I hated it. We agreed to swap every fortnight to the radio station of my choice, but on the mornings when a song I disliked (of which there were many) blasted me awake, it immediately put me in a bad mood. Similarly, the roles were reversed when my station was the wake-up call. Could we have chosen another way to wake up? Possibly, but two strong personalities don't always search for a rational solution. And my ongoing sleep deprivation from having to share a bed with him did not make me the most rational person at the time.

As with the 'in-bed' behaviours, I'm sure there are more personal quirks and proclivities that manifest themselves in the bedroom and serve to disturb a sleeping or attempting to sleep partner. However, I'm going to move on to the behaviours that some folk don't really like to talk about in nice company, but we all know happen when the sun goes down and we head to our bedrooms.

The stuff we don't really like to talk about

There are some human bodily functions and activities that we all know about, but don't like to mention. A few of these activities take place in the bedroom, and in the bed, and it's time to talk frankly about them.

Beeping your own horn

Animals do it. Humans do it. Apparently, humans do it on average 14 times a day. It's a natural bodily process of which we shouldn't be ashamed. It makes some people laugh uproariously and embarrasses others. It can be innocent and private or offensive and very public. Yep, I'm talking about passing wind, or, to be very blunt, farting.

On the list of bodily functions we can't control, this one sits on the margins. While the passing of wind can happen unknowingly during sleep, I know of many people who boast of producing redolent emissions in the bed and the effect it has had on a poor, unsuspecting partner. I have endured such behaviour and fail to see the humour in the act, but that's just me. This does tend to be a behaviour that amuses and entertains men more than women – if you question my gender bias on this claim, just search 'farting in bed' on YouTube.

Unfortunately for men, physiologically they are more prone to farting because they generate more gaseous product in a day than women, and this gas is released when they are most relaxed. This, even more unfortunately for their partners, is likely to be in bed.

While farting when both parties are awake is bad enough, farting while asleep constitutes cruel and unusual punishment.

Among a raft of behaviours that made me decide that I needed to sleep separately from my husband, his farting used to really, really irritate me. I should not have to put up with the smell of his fetid bowels when I am trying to go to sleep. As crude as that might be, it made me angry when he did fart in bed and even angrier when he thought it was funny. Even after six years of having separate bedrooms, he still thinks it amusing to come in

to my bedroom at night, pass wind, and then leave me with the smell. There aren't words to capture how furious I become.

Holly, 33, British public servant

When sleeping with my husband, there is always the chance I will be woken by what I call a 'vivid' dream. I'm in a deep slumber and having an amazing dream and thinking 'Wow this dream is so real! I can even smell everything' only to be slowly drawn out of my slumber to find that the 'vivid' smell in my dream is in fact real and is coming from my perfectly undisturbed peacefully sleeping husband lying next to me!

So after letting out a frustrating 'argh!' and purposefully waking up my husband giving him a good shove, because why should he have the luxury of sleeping while I have to deal with his smell, I grab my pillow in a fit of anger and traipse off to the spare room to try to salvage a few hours of solid sleep before my alarm is due to go off.

Emily, 30, international flight attendant, married 1 year

You know what? I sleep so much better when a man is not in my bed. My husband used to fart constantly, and it was really upsetting to me – smelly, gross and he stopped apologising too, so it was bad manners.

Anonymous, www.mamamia.com.au

It's one of life's little luxuries.

Ian, 42, electrician, married 5 years

The wet spot

When the activity and passion of sex is over and a couple is basking in the afterglow of their encounter, there can be an issue that takes the shine off both love and lust – the wet spot.

For some couples, who sleeps in the wet spot is not an issue at all. The post-coital bliss may be so overpowering that falling

asleep with each other comes naturally and without a second thought to the state of the sheets. But for others, it can make for an uncomfortable night's sleep – especially on cold winter nights.

The wet spot can vary in size, depending on the enthusiasm of the sexual act and if a condom was used. So if there is a moist area on the sheets, after each partner's breath has returned to normal and all the brain chemicals and feel-good after effects of sex start to kick in and sleep is washing over both of you, there is the inevitable battle of who gets to sleep in the dry part of the bed – or more importantly, who doesn't.

For those among us who are practical beings, preventative measures can be taken to mitigate the effects of the wet spot. Strategically placing a towel can help with absorption, but it's not very romantic and may take away from the spontaneity of the event. Having a spare sheet ready to quickly pop on the bed can also help, but again it's not really what most of us want to be doing after we've had sex.

Women may think that the chivalrous thing to do is for the man to valiantly offer up the dry area for his partner, but in these days of equality, that approach may be seen as untrue to the philosophies of the women's liberation movement.

Nine times out of ten, I will end up lying in the wet spot after sex. My partner falls asleep so quickly after sex, and it's a deep sleep that I can barely wake him from. I don't think he does it on purpose, but there have been many times that I have found a towel or a nighty to put over the spot so it's not so 'icky'. I know it sounds a bit whingy, but after six years together the romance is waning a bit and it's hard to not get practical about these things.

Sam, 32, administrative assistant

My wife makes a bit of a deal about the wet spot sometimes and will make me swap sides of the bed so that I have to sleep in it. I fall asleep quickly anyway, but I don't like not sleeping on my side of the bed.

Ben, 36, builder

Sleeping separately will not completely stop the issue of the wet spot either – it just splits it across two beds. The problem that separately sleeping couples may face is whose bed is going to be subjected to the possibility of the wet spot.

There have been a couple of times after I have put clean sheets on my bed that I have manoeuvred to have sex with my husband in his bed rather than mine. It took him a while to work it out, and then he started doing it too. 'Whose bed will have the spot' doesn't stop us having sex, but it makes choosing the location a bit more strategic. We mostly laugh about it.

Vicki, 46, executive officer, married 12 years

Baring it all

The last of the taboos to consider is what you wear to bed – or more specifically, what you don't. There's a spectrum of bed attire that runs from neck to ankle coverage, through to underwear such as pants and singlets and on to sleeping naked.

There are many reasons people give for sleeping naked:

- a level of freedom and comfort
- responding to and managing a high natural body temperature
- not having to deal with the hassles of nightclothes becoming tangled and uncomfortable
- the feeling of skin touching the skin of a partner
- less clothing to wash
- a general commitment to being naked.

If both parties are comfortable with the practice of sleeping nude then all is well. But people who have been brought up with a certain level of modesty may find nudity in bed confronting and inappropriate. As with so many other aspects of our social being, we bring a sackful of moral and social beliefs to judge the behaviours of others. Any type of nudity can have a dramatic effect on those who were raised with the message that it is clothes on at all times of the day! Sometimes it's just that you don't like the feel of another person's skin in the same way that other people do.

In 2002 I met my second wife, and we soon developed a very intimate relationship. She slept nude, all the time. It didn't matter if she had guests, if the kids were around, or what, when she slid into bed, she slid in naked. I questioned her on this, and to my surprise, she thought I was the one that needed enlightening. She was right!

I felt uncomfortable at first, sleeping nude with her both at her house, and at mine. (I often slept over and on occasion she would sleep over with me.) But she didn't care, she wasn't going to wear anything and be uncomfortable. So I began to sleep nude, too.

Andy, 42, married for 6 years

I stopped sleeping naked when I was with a boyfriend, not because I didn't want to be naked, but because he almost insisted that I sleep with clothes on. I don't know what kind of message that is supposed to send, but I'm not seeing him anymore, that's for sure.

Libertine, 29, www.albertastars.com

Being touched by my boyfriend's floppy penis at 2 am was never romantic or sexy. The reality for me is that it affected my ability to be intimate. I found it desensitising.

Justine, 32, town planner

That is my tour through some of the realities of bed sharing. I know the behaviours – both good and bad – discussed are not a complete list. This is because every couple is different and faces different challenges at different times in their life when it comes to why, how and who they sleep with. And it's the differences that are a critical factor in any discussion on the topic.

Each of the behaviours identified as 'bad' when it comes to sleeping with another person probably elicited responses that range from 'OMG – I totally get that and it's the reason I can't sleep with my partner' through to 'OMG, I can't believe anyone could be that petty – get over yourselves and just go to sleep'. The purpose of naming these issues is to highlight that sleeping in a bed with another person night after night is not a simple task, that is, it is not a simple task for everyone.

Some interesting facts to leave you with from the National Sleep Foundation Poll (America) 2005:

- When one spouse has a sleep problem, 75 per cent of their spouses end up with sleep problems too.
- If a spouse snores, the other spouse loses an average of 49 minutes of sleep each night.
- More than one third of people with sleep issues say the issues caused problems in their relationship.
- One quarter of spouses admitted that their sexual relationship had been affected by sleep issues.
- Twenty-three per cent of couples experiencing sleep problems end up in separate beds anyway.

PAUSE FOR THOUGHT...

- 🌙 Do any of the behaviours outlined in this chapter keep you from sleeping at night? For example,
 - How many blankets/bedcoverings are on the bed?
 - How thick or thin is the doona/duvet?
 - What temperature is the room?
 - Are the windows open or closed?
 - Is the fan on or off?
 - Is the air conditioning on or off? If it's on – what temperature?
- 🌙 Have you spoken to your partner about what keeps you awake?
- 🌙 How do you manage to get back to sleep if your partner disturbs your sleep?
- 🌙 Are there nights where one of you has had to find an alternative place to sleep because your partner's sleeping behaviours are keeping you awake? If so, do you have arrangements in place? What are they?
- 🌙 Have either of your sleeping behaviours been the cause of arguments in your relationship?