GUIDES clinical evidence update: Firm mattresses not best for back pain

**Key Point.** Recommend medium-firm mattresses rather than very firm ones for patients with chronic back pain.

**Discussion.** Although firm mattresses are commonly recommended for patients with chronic back pain, no evidence existed for best firmness for mattresses. A study in the Nov. 15 Lancet compared firm and medium-firm mattresses in a double-blind multicenter randomized control trial of 313 adults with chronic back pain. Patients sleeping on medium-firm (compared to very firm) mattress had less pain at night, less pain on arising, and less pain and less disability during the day. The underlying mechanism is probably the effect of firmness on pressure distribution and muscular function.

The recommendation for medium-firm mattresses will be incorporated into the next update of the UMHS clinical guideline on low back pain.

**References.**
Kovacs FM et al. Effect of firmness of mattress on chronic non-specific low-back pain: randomised, double-blind, controlled, multicentre trial. Lancet 2003; 362: 1599-1604. Available at: www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B6T1B-4B1S5TD-7&_coverDate=11%2F15%2F2003&_alid=133856643&_rdoc=1&_fmt=&_orig=search&_qd=1&_cdi=4886&_sort=d&view=c&_acct=C000007678&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=99318&md5=6f109e32eb6042fe88a4cc15e8b9e583


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