Sharing a bed with your partner can be a dream – or a nightmare! Discover some ways to make sure you both enjoy sweet snooze time...
As Valentine’s Day rolls around, we’re surrounded by romance, but what is the reality in our homes – and in our beds? The fact is, many couples struggle to share a bed, with 50 per cent of us losing sleep due to a battle over the bedsheets.

Nearly half of us compromise on sleep in order to accommodate our partners, with a quarter of us going to bed earlier than we’d like, and more than 1 in 5 of us sleeping like sardines, when we’d love to spread out!*

And who’s making these compromises? Well, it tends to be women, many of whom are already missing out on up to five hours’ sleep a week due to partners who snore, according to a University of Surrey study.

But this night-time tussle isn’t necessarily a sign of discord. A couple can be very much in love but still struggle to share a bed. ‘It’s a bigger issue for people than they’re willing to say, but it’s not necessarily a reflection of the couple’s relationship. It’s very common, even for long-term couples,’ says relationship coach Jo Hemmings (johemmings.co.uk). ‘And although we may have different needs when it comes to how hot the room is, or how much space we want, no one needs to lie awake suffering,’ says Jo. ‘Communicate with each other in a nice way,’ she says. ‘Make it clear that it’s not about the relationship, it’s about sleep, and talk about how you can reach compromises that allow you to sleep well. Say, “I don’t get enough sleep because of X, how are we going to solve it?”’ she suggests.

It’s important to have this conversation, to keep the relationship healthy and happy. ‘Lack of sleep can cause fatigue the next day, making us feel cranky. If it’s constant, it can wear you down,’ says Jo, adding, ‘don’t let this build up without discussing it with your partner, because that can lead to bigger issues arising that might never have appeared otherwise.’

What are the common sleep issues and how can you solve them?

**Uncomfortable cuddling**

Even those of us who love cuddling can find that falling asleep entwined isn’t ideal. Jo advises clients to untangle after an initial cuddle. ‘I had a couple who liked to fall asleep cuddling,’ says Jo, ‘but they’d get uncomfortable, or very hot, making it difficult to sleep. I suggested that she moved away as soon as he was asleep, or vice versa – just to their side of the bed. It didn’t mean anything about their relationship and it wasn’t a rejection, it just meant they could get a more comfortable night’s sleep.’ Jo’s advice is echoed by Hope Bastine, a sleep expert at Fresh Perception (freshperception.com), who suggests experimenting with cuddling positions that are easy to disentangle from.

*When he’s here I have to get used to his snoring again.*

Ros, 52, finds that white noise eclipses her partner’s snoring.

‘I’ve been with my partner 10 years, but he’s often away for long periods of time, so when he’s here I have to get used to his snoring again. We’ve managed to solve the problem by playing white noise from YouTube clips – I pick ones that last 8-10 hours. We’ve also tried clips of jet engine noise, the sound of a crackling open fire, and my personal favourite, the sound of falling rain. In the summer, a fan in the room also helps mask his snoring.’

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**Embrace the space**
If you like your space and are happier sleeping alone, even the best-behaved bedfellow can disrupt your sleep. ‘Even if you never spread out, just having someone else there changes the balance of the mattress slightly; and when you roll over in your sleep, it’s different having someone else there,’ says Jo, who suggests buying the biggest bed you can afford (and fits inside your bedroom). ‘Switching from a standard double bed, to a queen, king-size or even an emperor, makes a massive difference,’ she says.

Hope agrees: ‘we’re meant to have at least 10cm around us – above, below, and on either side. Feeling like you’re on the edge of the bed can disrupt your feeling of safety and comfort. Room size can be an issue, but couples do need to think about getting a bigger bed if they can – the bigger the better!’

**OPPONENTS ATTRACT**
‘Temperature is a huge issue,’ says Hope. This is because couples tend to have different heat sweet spots. Hope recommends mattress covers with dual heating systems, which can be cooler on one side and warmer on the other. Jo suggests duvets with different togs on each side to cater to different needs. She also suggests separate duvets or blankets. ‘That way you can layer up to get the temperature you want, and it gives you a feeling of your own space,’ she says. If your partner thrashes about in their sleep, having your own bedding reduces that problem. And if you’re left in the cold because your partner hogs the duvet? ‘Buy a duvet that’s one size bigger than your bed. I have a super king duvet for my king-size bed for this exact reason,’ says Hope.
DISTURBING SNORING
‘Studies have shown that women lose years of sleep because they put up with their partners’ snoring,’ says Hope, who advises seeking medical advice. ‘Certain positions reduce snoring, and silicone ear plugs can help block out the noise, but snoring can be indicative of sleep apnea, so take him to the doctor to check out what issues there might be, and what could work as a solution. There are many technologies, gadgets and surgeries available.’

If you need a quick-fix, Jo suggests building a wall of pillows between the two of you, to muffle the noise. ‘Use foam pillows rather than feather to absorb the sound,’ she says.

GOING IT ALONE
‘Long-term couples can get fed up of the issues, and reach a point where they prefer sleeping on their own,’ says Jo. ‘That might sound drastic, but it doesn’t have to mean the end of the relationship – or the end of intimacy. It’s another option,’ says Hope. ‘For a couple, the bedroom and the bed is an intimate, sacred space, and I think that’s what couples are frightened of losing when they think about separate bedrooms, but that can easily be fixed. As long as you carve out your couple time, for physical and emotional intimacy, everybody will still be happy.

‘It can make the intimate side of a relationship more exciting because when you do spend that time together, it’s not just “let’s just roll over and do it,” it’s setting aside a special place and time for it.’

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‘WHEN IT COMES TO BEDTIME, I NEED TO HAVE THINGS JUST SO.’

Lou, 47, says single duvets were a game changer for her.

‘I love sharing a bed with my husband but I need to have things just so, otherwise I can’t sleep,’ says Lou, of womanready.co.uk. ‘At the start of our relationship we had issues because we have different body temperatures. I go to bed cold, and he goes to bed warm, so sharing a duvet didn’t work well for us!

‘Two years into our relationship, we went on a trip to Copenhagen, and the hotel gave us two single duvets, rather than a double. It worked so much better for us, we bought two single duvets as soon as we got home. We’ve been together for 15 years now and we sleep better than we ever did when we shared a duvet – and now I’m having hot flushes, I don’t disturb him when I pull the duvet on and off all night!’

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