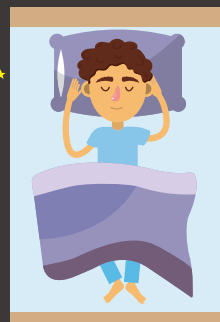


Such stuff as dreams are made on: eczema-friendly bedding

Poor sleep patterns are all too common in eczema and the night-time itch can be a torment. For this edition, we asked supporters on our Facebook page to share their top tips for eczema-friendly bedding. **Alice Lambert**, our Director of Services, reports on their suggestions.



Given the amount of time we spend in bed throughout our lifetimes – the average Briton spends 17 years and 41 days asleep – it makes sense to think carefully about our bedding choices. That said, faced with the dizzying array of products available, it can be difficult to know which to choose – especially when you have to take eczema into account. Natural or synthetic materials, duvets or blankets, high tog or low tog, spring or no-spring mattresses....

People with eczema are prone to experiencing sleep problems due to the dreaded itch-scratch cycle, which can keep them awake and affect partners' sleep too. It's worth considering whether your bedding is inadvertently making you itchier and contributing to poor sleep. It's also important to bear in mind that, unfortunately, there is no 'magic bullet' for eczema. What works for one person won't necessarily work for another. However, there are actions you can take and products you can use to maximise your chances of an itch-free night.

TRIGGERS TO BE AWARE OF

The body's temperature control mechanism is often flawed in eczematous skin, and overheating is common. For many people, sweat is also a trigger. Bedding that leads to overheating will encourage itchiness and many of us scratch most during the night. It's advisable to use thin cotton blankets or a lighter duvet, so check the number of 'togs' – the units of thermal resistance in textiles.

A lower tog rating (e.g. 1.5–4.5) indicates that it's light weight. In the colder months, you might prefer to use two low-tog duvets and remove one if you become too hot. For most people with eczema, memory foam mattresses are probably best avoided as they are designed to react to the heat of your body and mould to your shape, thereby reducing the circulation of air and making you feel warm.

Some people's eczema is triggered by house-dust-mite droppings. If you are sensitive to these droppings, cutting down on dust in the home can help as droppings are contained within dust. House-dust mites thrive in humid conditions and, unsurprisingly, they are found in the largest numbers in mattresses and other bedding, which contain a good supply of their main food source: flakes of skin. In order to cut down on house-dust-mite droppings, wash bed linen regularly – if possible, at least twice a week – and pillows and duvets every 4–6 weeks at 60°C. Tumble drying on a hot setting will also help to destroy house-dust mites. Washing bedding regularly is important for getting rid of treatment residue, too. Give the mattress a thorough vacuuming whenever you change the bedding.

Whatever type of mattress you choose, they aren't designed to last for ever and house-dust-mite droppings will inevitably build up. Manufacturers recommend that we change our mattresses every 8–10 years. While they obviously have an interest in our doing so, if you or your child has eczema, buying a

new mattress can be a good investment. In particular, new babies (with or without eczema) should always have a new cot mattress and, if possible, buy a new mattress when your child graduates to a bed.

• HIS DARK MATERIALS

Bedding made from many different kinds of materials is on offer nowadays – varieties of cotton, silk, bamboo, microfibre, wool – and, where duvets and pillows are concerned, there is both the covering material and filling to think about. First, it's important to be aware of thread counts. A thread count relates to the number of threads (width and length) that make up an inch of woven fabric, and tells us how closely woven the fabric is. A typical, inexpensive sheet might have a count of 150, whereas more expensive bedding might have a 500-count. Generally, the higher the thread count, the softer and cooler the sheet, and the more likely it will wear well over time.

• Cotton

Many of our Facebook users strongly recommend using bedding made from 100% cotton, which is soft, cool, absorbs sweat and allows the skin to 'breathe'. Duvet covers, pillowcases and sheets are all available in 100% cotton. It is even possible to buy duvets of different togs that have a 100% cotton covering **and** are filled with 100% cotton material. These are likely to be safe and beneficial for people with eczema, but have the downside of not being as easy to wash and dry as duvets filled with synthetic material.

Duvets filled with synthetic material (e.g. microfibre) can be washed at higher temperatures than cotton-filled duvets, and dry more easily. For the best of both worlds, try synthetic-filled duvets and pillows covered with a 100% cotton covering, combined with 100% cotton pillowcases and duvet covers. For those who aren't keen on duvets, 100% cotton cellular blankets provide an alternative option.

Pillow and duvet protectors go over the pillow/duvet and under the pillowcase/duvet cover, providing an extra layer of cotton protection.

Cotton comes in a variety of weaves. Be aware that a cheap cotton may lead to bobbles in the bedding, which could irritate eczema. Sateen (a fabric made from woven cotton, which has a soft, silk-like feel to it) and percale (a close-woven fabric that comes in either 100% cotton or a blend of fabrics) are suitable for eczema sufferers. Grown in the fertile Nile Valley, Egyptian cotton has an extra-long fibre that yields a strong, highly absorbent material.

• Bamboo

With a texture similar to silk, bamboo bedding is more absorbent than cotton, soft and highly effective at regulating temperature, keeping the user cool in summer and warm in winter. Bamboo can be confusing – it appears in different guises in product information: 100% bamboo viscose/ rayon, 100% bamboo lyocell, bamboo blend with cotton and bamboo linen. Most bamboo bedding is the viscose variety. While the processing of bamboo viscose is chemical-intensive, this material contains the aforementioned properties that make bamboo attractive to people with eczema. In terms of environmental friendliness, bamboo linen and lyocell are the better choices. The following products are available in bamboo fabric: duvets (including bamboo-filled, bamboo-covered duvets), duvet covers, pillowcases and sheets, plus duvet, pillow and mattress protectors. A disadvantage of bamboo is that it doesn't tolerate high temperature washing too well – users are recommended to wash bamboo bedding at temperatures of up to 40°C, which is insufficient to kill house-dust mites or remove emollient residue effectively.

• Silk

Silk is a traditionally luxurious and glamorous material, but does it help with eczema? Silk is a natural product, is 'breathable' and, like

bamboo, is excellent at temperature regulation. It also provides an inhospitable environment for house-dust mites, which bodes well for eczema sufferers. The following products are available in silk: duvets (including silk-filled, silk-covered duvets), silk-filled pillows, duvet covers, pillowcases and sheets. A disadvantage of silk is that sheets and covers can only be washed at low temperatures (30°C), and silk-filled duvets and pillows can only be spot cleaned and professionally laundered.

• Wool

Surprisingly, perhaps, wool should be considered an option for people with eczema because of its temperature-regulating properties and dry, house-dust-mite-resistant environment. Wool-filled duvets and pillows, and wool beds and mattresses are all available. A disadvantage of wool, as with some of the other materials, is that some products are only machine washable at 30°C on a delicate or wool cycle with special wool detergent, and some can be dry cleaned only. It's advisable for parents to check that babies aren't allergic to lanolin before trying wool bedding.

TAKING THE STRESS OUT OF MATTRESSES

Mattresses are a big investment, so it's worth trying out potential candidates in the shops first. If your current mattress is in good condition but you are worried it's exacerbating your eczema, try using a mattress protector in 100% cotton, bamboo or silk over the mattress, underneath a sheet made from one of those materials, and see if that makes a difference. Be aware that some 'mattress protectors' do not completely encase the mattress; these are usually called 'mattress toppers'. It's best to use one that does. If you are looking for protection from house-dust mites, though, you need to find mattress and pillow protectors that stop the mites in their tracks. It's vital that the covers encase the mattress or pillow, but they won't be 100% cotton and could well be tightly woven synthetic material such as polyester. They should be labelled to specify what they are

effective against – house-dust mites, cat allergens, moulds, etc. Do not buy something that is vaguely labelled 'anti-allergy'.

There are three main types of mattress: innerspring, foam and bladder (air and waterbeds). The inner cavity of innerspring mattresses creates an incubator for house-dust mites where their droppings and our dead skin cells accumulate. These mattresses should be avoided where possible. As mentioned above, memory foam mattresses are also not ideal as they can lead to overheating.

An alternative type of foam mattress is latex. Natural latex is resilient and resistant to house-dust mites, mould and mildew. Latex mattresses tend to be more expensive than other mattresses, but also last longer. Because of the processes they undergo during their production, latex mattresses are usually safe for people with latex allergies, especially those who suffer from localised skin reactions or minor respiratory problems when exposed to medical-grade latex. But if you have a known latex allergy or sensitivity, check with your doctor to discuss risk factors before sleeping on a latex mattress.

Buying new bedding can be daunting, and you may need to experiment with different materials before finding one that suits you. It's possible that minor adjustments to your bedding arrangements (e.g. introducing protectors/encasements, carrying out more regular washes of bedding at hot temperatures), could make a positive difference, so it's worth trying these before undertaking a wholesale change of all bedding products. It's also important to keep up with your regular skin-care routine while trialling new products. Please let us know if there are any products or materials that have worked particularly well for you.

Good luck, and sweet dreams! >

USEFUL WEBSITES

Please note that – where multiple websites are listed below – not every website contains every product listed above it. Also, look carefully at the information about a product's material. Unless a material is explicitly stated to be 100% cotton (for example), then it's not.

100% cotton bedding – blankets, duvets, duvet covers, pillowcases and sheets, plus duvet, pillow and mattress protectors:

Allergy Best Buys

<https://www.allergybestbuys.co.uk/products/cellular-blanket>

Allersafe

<https://www.allersafe.co.uk/cottonfresh/b31>

Greenfibres

<https://www.greenfibres.com/product/279/bedroom.htm>

John Lewis

<https://www.johnlewis.com/home-garden/bedding/c60000246?rdr=1>

Lancashire textiles

<https://www.lancshiretextiles.co.uk/products/lt-cottduv-lancashire-textiles-natural-100-pure-cotton-filling-and-cover-1-tog-summer-weig.html>

M&S

www.marksandspencer.com/s/home-and-furniture/bed-linen

Pure Living Collection

www.purelivingcollection.com/cotton-duvet.html

The Duvet Store

<https://www.theduvetstore.co.uk/index.php/Luxury-Sheets-Duvet-Covers-Pillow-Cases/View-all-products.htm>



The Fine Cotton Company

www.thefinecottoncompany.com/luxury-bed-linen/bed-linens-and-duvet-covers-collections

Bamboo viscose bedding – duvets, duvet covers, pillowcases and sheets, plus duvet, pillow and mattress protectors:

Between the Sheets

<https://www.betweenthesheets.co.uk/product-category/uk/bamboo-bed-sheets/>

Silk bedding – duvets, pillows, duvet covers, pillowcases and sheets

Gingerlily

<https://www.gingerlily.co.uk/silk-bed-linen>, <http://www.gingerlily.co.uk/silk-bedding>

John Lewis

<https://www.johnlewis.com/search?Ntt=silk%20duvet&Nty=1>

Pure Living

www.purelivingcollection.com/mulberry-silk-duvet.html

Wool bedding – wool-filled duvets, pillows, mattress protectors, mattresses and beds

The Wool Company

<https://www.thewoolcompany.co.uk/luxury-bedding.html>

Wool Room

www.thewoolroom.com/bedding/, www.thewoolroom.com/wool-beds-mattresses/

Latex pillows and mattresses

Greenfibres

<https://www.greenfibres.com/product/332/standard.htm>

John Lewis

https://www.johnlewis.com/search/dunlopillo/_/N-1z13z7z?Ntt=latex

Latexsense

<https://www.latexsense.co.uk/latex-sense/latex-mattresses/c54>