

Time for a bed check

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One of the most beneficial home improvements you can make is in the piece of furniture you use more than any other in the house - your bed. When you're ready to feather the nest, consider more than just aesthetics. Beautiful bed linens and a handsome headboard are nice, but it's the quality of the mattress that affects your sleep, overall health and well-being.

How do you know when it's time for a new mattress? The following are guidelines to help you examine your bed:

1. Is the mattress more than 8-10 years old? If so, it's probably no longer providing adequate comfort and support.
2. Is the cover soiled, stained or torn?
3. Do the mattress or foundation (boxspring) surfaces show sagging spots or look uneven?
4. Would you be embarrassed to show your bed, without covers, to your neighbors?
5. Is the mattress comfortable in some places and in some positions, but not in others?
6. When you turn over, do you hear creaks or crunches?
7. When you roll around, does the bed wobble or sway?
8. Are you and your partners rolling together without meaning to?
9. Are you fighting each other for enough space to get comfortable?
10. Do you wake up with a neck or backache?

If you answered "yes" to one or more of these questions, your old mattress may be ready for retirement. Still in doubt? Go mattress shopping and compare what is available today with the feel of your old mattress.

Cleaning your carpets

How often does your carpet need cleaning? It depends. Is it located in an entrance way or another heavy traffic area? Does it have a protective finish to help guard against soil and stains?

Carpets treated with a finish such as Scotchgard Stain Release carpet protector will not require cleaning as often as untreated carpets. But some experts suggest residential styles be cleaned at least once a year.

How do you know when it's time to clean your carpet? This depends on the color and the amount of traffic. Your eye is generally the best judge. You should clean your carpet, however, BEFORE it stops responding to daily vacuuming.

You can either have the carpet professionally cleaned or do it yourself with steam cleaning equipment. Professional extraction, better known as "steam cleaning," is reputedly the best cleaning method because it leaves the least amount of detergent residue.

Steam Clean
If you clean the carpet yourself, use steam cleaning equipment rather than a detergent or shampoo, which leaves a soap residue that can interfere with protective finishes already on the carpet. Whichever method you choose, remember some key points:

✓ Before cleaning, place foil or plastic pads under furniture legs to avoid staining or rust spotting while the carpet is still damp.

✓ After cleaning stain and soil resistant treatments are available, but check before using them to be sure you won't void the manufacturer's warranty.

✓ Some carpet cleaning services attempt to sell you "reapplications" of protective treatments, such as silicone sprays. These treatments demonstrate excellent repellency characteristics, but may cancel out existing soil and stain protection and void the manufacturer's warranty. Also choose a branded protector you can trust.

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