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Methodology of research meaning

If you've watched one (or three, or a dozen) of our product review videos, you've probably wondered: How exactly does the Sleepopolis team figure out what makes a product good or bad? Well, that's a great question! So, allow me and the rest of the Sleepopolis crew to fill you in.Below, we're going to discuss our respective reviewing methodologies, explain the tests we use, and provide some insight into how we utilize the data we collect to make our recommendations.General MethodologyOne of the things that sets us apart from other reviewers on the Internet is our preference for personally testing out the products we include on our site. We value a hands-on approach because it affords us the opportunity to assess items on our own terms, using tests and processes that give us (and you!) a full picture of what a product is actually like. At the end of the day, we believe the best way to understand a mattress (or pillow or blanket or sheet) is to roll up our sleeves and feel it for ourselves.This is invaluable for a number of reasons, but perhaps the most important is that it allows us to figure out the pros and cons of every single product. We want you to know everything you could possibly know about whatever item we're testing, so we're not going to skirt the not-so-great deets nor are we going to ignore the obviously fantastic stuff going on. In our opinion, there's no such thing as a "good" or "bad" product, but simply ones that are better for certain individuals than others.The Sleepopolis Expert NetworkIn addition to developing and utilizing a rigorous methodology for testing out the products on our site, we also rely on an extensive Expert Network of physical therapists, doctors, psychologists, neurologists, dieticians, other medical professionals, and writers to verify the information we put out there.That means that if we claim a particular mattress could be great for those with back pain, we might chat about it with physical therapist Dr. Keith Poorbaugh to ensure the statement's validity. And when it comes to writing on topics like REM sleep or circadian rhythms, we could check in with neurologist Dr. Joseph Krainin or clinical psychologist Dr. Janet Kennedy before hitting publish.By tapping into these fantastic resources, we're able to create dynamic content that's not only interesting, but powered by actual professionals in the sleep space.Mattress ReviewsGeneral methodology aside, let's get into some of the details of how we review mattresses. Below, I'm going to walk you through my favorite tests and explain why I use them and how I interpret the results they yield. I'm also going to check in with some of our other writers to get their hot takes on the mattress testing game.FirmnessFirmness is an important component of a bed's feel as it'll tell you how much support and pressure relief you'll likely experience on a mattress. While I could talk forever about my own personal thoughts on the firmness of a bed, I think the best approach is to provide my readers with a range of different firmness ratings compiled from my lovely coworkers. During every review, I have four testers try out the mattress, so that I might illustrate its firmness gradient, but also demonstrate how diverse bodies interact differently with the same structure.Our writer Laura Schwecherl, for example, is a self-described side sleeper who experiences mattresses as much softer than I do, a career stomach sleeper. "I look for a mattress with initial sinkage for pressure relief, followed by sturdy support underneath," she explains. "This way my shoulders and hips have something plush to push into, while I can still change positions easily." But numbers and ratings don't exist in a vacuum, so it's my job to use these readings to power my analysis of the mattress. If my testers say it's soft, I'm going to thoroughly explain what's going on in the bed's layers to make it that way. If they say it's got tons of firm support, I'm going to precisely pinpoint where that's coming from and who might benefit from it most.Pressure ReliefOnce we've got firmness sorted, it's time to dive into pressure relief. This section is particularly beneficial for those sleepers who need to alleviate tension, either at the shoulders for side sleepers, at the lumbar region for those who doze primarily on their backs, or at the hips for folks who prefer the prone position. When I review a bed, I want to know exactly where pressure is likely to form so I can tailor my recommendations to those who might benefit (or really not benefit) from its specific amount of relief.To illustrate where these tension spots might crop up, I like to stretch out on a pressure map. This device records how I'm interacting with the mattress and produces a graphic simulating the pressure exerted by my body in various positions. When you see this graphic in my videos or write-ups, you can easily discern high pressure spots (lit up in red) from areas with little to no tension (lit up in blue). While I'll always describe the pressure I experience on a mattress, this graphic is super useful for helping you envision the tension you'll likely feel.Motion TransferNext, I like to assess a bed's motion transfer, or the amount of motion that's detectable from one side of the mattress to the other. Though this test is important for all sleepers, it's especially beneficial for those who share their bed with a partner or pet as it'll demonstrate whether or not you'll be bothered by movements while you slumber.As our staff editor Cody Gohl puts it: "When I'm thinking about a bed's motion transfer, I basically want to know how likely it is that someone's going to wake me up in the middle of the night if they have to get up to use the bathroom."To gauge a bed's motion transfer, I conduct a bounce test in which I drop a 10 lb steel ball from heights of four, eight, and twelve inches. Before letting the ball fly free, I set up a seismograph on the other side of the bed to measure the intensity of these bounces, which it does by producing a line graph marking their frequencies. By assessing this graph, I can then better understand how bothersome a toss and turn in the night might be and articulate those findings to you!SinkageAnd finally, it's crucial to a test a bed's sinkage, or the amount you're likely to sink into a structure. While sinkage is always going to be dependent on an individual's height and weight, I've discovered a pretty effective way for showcasing the typical amount one can expect to experience on any given mattress.For this assessment, I place four different sized balls (6 lb, 10 lb, 50 lb, and 100 lb) on the surface and measure how far they press into the bed. The varying densities are meant to simulate different parts of the body, so take into account the fact that an individual's core is likely to push in further than, say, their hand or arm. For consistency's sake, I always make sure to use the same balls for every mattress review.Once I know these measurements, I can predict whether you're going to feel like you're sleeping "on top" of the bed or "in" it, which can be a handy bit of data for those after a specific vibe.Sheet ReviewsSure, most sheets look great when they're fresh out of the package... but how are you supposed to know which sheets are best for you just by looking at them? To figure that out, I spoke with our bedding expert Sarah Riccio, who shared her method for assessing the quality of new sheets.For her, it really comes down to three main factors: fiber length, material shine, and breathability. Below, she'll walk us through her step-by-step process for analyzing each of these factors.The Fiber Factor"When it comes time to review a new set of sheets (or any bedding, for that matter), the first thing I take note of is the length of the fibers used in the fabric," Sarah explains. "Now, for decades, bedding brands have encouraged the idea that thread count is the primary factor for determining sheet quality — but this is not the case!"In her words, while thread count isn't necessarily "negligible," a better indicator of quality is the length of the fabric fibers themselves. The rule of thumb is: the longer the fibers (commonly referred to as staples), the more soft and durable the fabric will be. Oh, and don't worry — you don't have to measure the fibers yourself. More often than not, bedding brands will advertise that information freely.The Shine TestOnce Sarah's uncovered all the specs about the fibers, she moves onto the appearance of the fabric. Some sheets are woven to provide a matte finish, some are woven to offer a lustrous sheen, and plenty of bedding falls somewhere in between. So, it's her job to fully assess their surface-level shine. "Since it can be hard to tell what a sheet set looks like just by viewing it on the Internet, I fold my bedding under the light soon after it arrives to get an up-close look at how shiny (or not shiny) it is," she says. "This way, I can quickly determine whether or not my freshly ordered sheets have the look I was going for."But here's a pro tip: If you prefer a lustrous sheen, aim for sateen. If you like a solid matte look, try percale! For more on the differences between the two finishes, check out Sarah's full Sateen vs. Percale sheets guide.The Temperature TestAnd finally, after Sarah's explored the details surrounding durability and appearance, it's time to determine whether a sheet set is going to keep her warm or cool. "Testing airflow, moisture-wicking ability, and any brand-specific cooling properties lets me know how each sheet set is going to affect my body temperature," she says. Her specific method has a couple of steps, which she explains with much more clarity than I could:"So, the first thing I do is rub my hands over the fabric to see if it's cool to the touch — this gives me an initial sense of the bedding's temperature. Then, I billow the top sheet over my body to gauge how well the air is flowing through the fabric (the more airflow I feel, the cooler I know I'll sleep). Once I've spent some time rolling around in bed, I'll take a moment to see how cool and dry I feel. Some fabrics do offer superior airflow, but are lacking in the moisture-wicking department. So, if you're prone to night sweats, I suggest you aim for materials like bamboo, Tencel, and other fabrics known for their moisture-wicking capabilities."Pillow ReviewsBut Sarah doesn't just test out sheets — she's also a pillow maven able to expertly discern an individual's pillow needs based on their personal preferences. Though sleepers can get extra picky about the cushions with which they snuggle up, Sarah says there are a few general characteristics to consider when testing out a new pillow: loft, support, and cooling.Loft"One of the first things I pay attention to when I'm reviewing a new pillow is the loft," she claims. "The loft, or height, lets me know which body types and sleep positions will be most compatible with a specific pillow." The loft can be felt by either laying down on a pillow or pressing into its center and seeing how much it compresses under pressure.While Sarah says you can go with whatever loft feels best to you, she does tend to categorize certain sleepers with certain types of loft.High Loft – Ideal for side sleepers or folks with broader shoulders as it helps to relieve pressure at the neck and keep the head in neutral alignment with the spine. Medium Loft – A good zone for back sleepers as it keeps the head lifted, but not so aggressively that it causes the neck to crane out of position.Low Loft – This last category is best suited for stomach sleepers as it helps to prevent the upper body from dipping out of alignment with the hips.SupportAs with mattresses, the support of a pillow can make or break it for certain sleepers and, according to Sarah, it all comes down to the types of materials being used. So, it's important for her to thoroughly assess a pillow's construction in order to fully understand how it will prop up an individual."It might sound obvious, but every material does offer a different feel and level of support," she clarifies. "However, there are some general guidelines that can point you in the right direction of the pillow that's best for you. For example, latex is going to offer a bouncier, quicker response to pressure as compared to memory foam. Down and down-alternatives are going to be fluffy and shapeable. And finding an adjustable pillow is a good idea for sleepers who are still experimenting with the loft and firmness that works for them!"CoolingTo round out her reviews, Sarah always takes a minute to ponder a pillow's cooling properties. Since folks get so up-close-and-personal with their pillows, temperature regulation can be an important factor for hot sleepers to consider before making a new purchase. To test this, she employs a hands-on method that's as simple as it is effective."When I'm trying to figure out whether or not a pillow sleeps cool, the first thing I do is fluff it. If I can feel air flowing out of the cover fabric when I press into it, I know it's breathable and is going to help dissipate my body's heat. And when breathability isn't enough, I look for specific cooling features like moisture-wicking ability, Phase Change Material and Cool Gel memory foam."Other ProductsThough the bulk of our reviews center on mattresses, pillows, and bedding, we pride ourselves on testing out a diverse range of sleep accessories, including eye masks, blackout curtains, sleep trackers, bed cooling and heating devices, adjustable frames, and night lights, just to name a few.While each product category necessitates a unique review methodology, there are a few questions we endeavor to answer with every single item:Functionality – Does the product work? If so, how can we demonstrate the full scope of its functionality? For an eye mask, it might involve rolling around in multiple positions while wearing it to test its wearability. For blackout curtains, it could entail multiple tests in different rooms with different amounts of light. User-friendliness – If we can assess that a product is functional, we'll then concern ourselves with figuring out its use-ability. Is the remote with the adjustable frame easy to read or are the buttons too complicated? Does the sleep tracker sync automatically with your smartphone or does it require another device? Ultimately, this good needs to add something to your life without too much fuss, so these questions help us to better understand the user experience you'll likely have.Value – And finally, we come to value i.e. is this product worth the money? Answering this question is as subjective as any of the others we pose, so it's not about us providing a simple yes or no; rather, it's about us giving you all the information you need to decide if it's going to be a worthwhile purchase for yourself.In ConclusionAt the end of the day, our methodology is rooted in both personal experience and hard data to give you a 360° view of a product. It may not be possible for you to test out all the bedroom accessories you'd like to buy, but that's why we're here, to equip you with the knowledge you need to make the purchasing decisions that are 100% right for you!Get the latest deals, discounts, reviews, and giveaways!

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