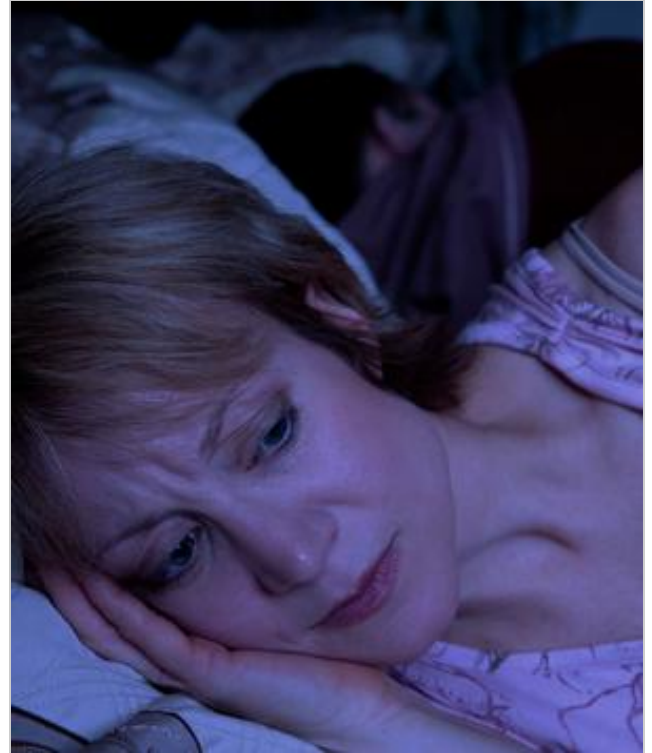


## 5 Couple Sleep Dilemmas, Solved

*Have a snorer, kicker or cover hog in your bed? Yes, you can still snooze in peace.*

By Kiley Bense

When you share a bed with your significant other (as 70 percent of Americans do, according to a 2013 National Sleep Foundation poll



Diane Diederich/Getty Images

([http://sleepfoundation.org/sites/default/files/bedroompoll/NSF\\_Bedroom\\_Poll\\_Report.pdf](http://sleepfoundation.org/sites/default/files/bedroompoll/NSF_Bedroom_Poll_Report.pdf))), you often share their sleep problems, too. Snoring, restlessness, and insomnia not only interrupt the sleep of the person suffering, but they can make shut-eye difficult for a bed partner, too. And smaller issues can be just as much of a nuisance, whether it's one person who hogs the comforter or a partner who won't quit texting after lights-out.

Some of the most common nighttime disturbances are genuine disorders, according to sleep experts, like insomnia and obstructed sleep apnea – both of which can and should be treated by a doctor. While occasional insomnia is somewhat common, some adults suffer from chronic insomnia (<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/insomnia/basics/definition/CON-20024293>), characterized by consistent difficulty falling or staying asleep. Sleep apnea (<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/sleep-apnea/basics/definition/con-20020286>), on the other hand, is the repeated stopping and starting of breathing during sleep, triggered by problems with muscles in the throat that control breathing. (People who have sleep apnea often snore loudly.)

Even if your bedfellow doesn't have a medically treatable problem, practical solutions can help you both achieve a more restful night.

### **The dilemma: A snoring bedmate**

It's an incredibly common problem, and also an incredibly annoying one. The first trick is an obvious one: Earplugs can be a lifesaver. If that doesn't work (or isn't comfortable), giving the non-snorer time to drift off first can be helpful, as you're less likely to be roused once you're in a deep sleep.

A position shift can also help. "Simple snoring is often positional," says Dr. Wendy Troxel, a social and behavioral scientist, psychologist, and sleep medicine specialist at the University of Pittsburgh who studies sleep and relationships. Sleeping on your back can make you more likely to snore, so if that's how your partner usually snoozes, Troxel suggests asking him or her to try turning over.

Dr. Janet Kennedy, a clinical psychologist and the founder of NYC Sleep Doctor, recommends using a special pillow, a neti pot, or mouth guard. A fan or white noise machine may also help. "White noise in the bedroom can help to create a buffer to make the snoring less jarring," Kennedy says.

Alcohol consumption, excess weight and nasal problems can also exacerbate snoring, the Mayo Clinic reports (<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/snoring/basics/causes/con-20031874>).

### **The dilemma: Tossing and turning**

Dr. Kennedy recommends first trying to get to the root of the restlessness. Tossing and turning at night can be caused by everything from Restless Legs Syndrome or ADHD to medication side effects or stress, each of which can be addressed independently.

If restlessness is just that person's normal sleep pattern, you can buy a special mattress that minimizes movement, or even a bigger bed. "The bigger the bed, the less likely you are to disturb your partner," Troxel says.

### **The dilemma: A cover thief**

Some couples deal with this issue by buying two beds and sliding them next to each other, each covered with a different set of sheets, Troxel says. You can place a big comforter over both of you, but in the middle of the night, your sheets will stay on your respective sides. Problem solved.

### **The dilemma: Night owl vs. early riser**

Don't try to force going to sleep at the same time if one of you isn't ready, Troxel says. But that doesn't mean you have to miss out on the intimacy of spending time together in bed: Commit to doing so before the first partner is ready for sleep. Once he or she drifts off, the night owl can get out of bed and resume other activities.

"It's really important to have a conversation about it," Kennedy says. "People are very protective of their sleep. And when they're not sleeping, they don't feel very good." A candid discussion (preferably not at bedtime) can lead to small but helpful solutions. For example, the early riser could try an eye mask, or the night owl might consider using a book light.

### **The dilemma: Nighttime tech use**

Sorry, but there's a clear winner on this debate: The bed and bedroom "should be a haven for couples," Troxel says. Smartphones, tablets, laptops and TVs disrupt sleep psychologically (interacting with them is stimulating) and physiologically (the light they emit suppresses melatonin and can keep you awake longer). Troxel recommends setting up a docking station for electronics that's outside the bedroom. Kennedy agrees: "Our access to work and work-related activities is eroding our sleep," she says. "You need a buffer between work and bed." Technology on your nightstand brings work and all its stresses into the bedroom, and that makes going to sleep peacefully more difficult.

Tried all these and still no luck? Kennedy suggests monitoring how you respond to disturbances – an emotional reaction to unwanted noises or movement can prolong the time you spend awake and worsen the disruption's effect on your sleep.

If none of these solutions work, you could consider sleeping in different beds or rooms (as 11 percent of couples report doing, according to the National Sleep Foundation ([http://sleepfoundation.org/sites/default/files/bedroompoll/NSF\\_Bedroom\\_Poll\\_Report.pdf](http://sleepfoundation.org/sites/default/files/bedroompoll/NSF_Bedroom_Poll_Report.pdf))). For many couples, it's the time right before sleep that's most vital to a relationship, not the slumber itself. Closeness and intimacy are fostered in that interval between day and night, explains Troxel, as it's often the only time when couples are alone together. "Finding a way to maintain that," she says, "is most important."

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