

## Pulling Back the Sheets: Exploring the Impact of Sleep on Couples' Relationships

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Most people understand that good sleep is essential for your health. However, few people consider how sleep can impact romantic relationships. Research has discovered that sleeping in the same bed can affect relationship health.

### *My Sleep Is Your Sleep*

When couples sleep in the same bed, their sleep patterns become interdependent. They can even synchronize! Research indicates that up to 30% of an individual's sleep quality (or lack thereof) is influenced by their partner's sleep.<sup>1</sup> In addition, studies have found a high level of synchrony in couples' sleep patterns. These synchronies can occur on a minute-to-minute basis throughout the night.<sup>2,3</sup> This demonstrates how deeply connected partners' sleep are. It also highlights how one partner's sleep can influence the other's.

### *Bed Sharing: Social Norm or Science?*

Sleeping patterns of couples often become a hot topic for news outlets. In particular, people love to discuss whether partners choose to sleep in the same or separate beds. Why does this capture public interest? Likely because it touches on the societal pressure surrounding the concept of bed sharing (the marital or shared bed).

However, the pressure around bed sharing is largely based on social beliefs and norms. It is not based on solid scientific evidence. Sleeping in the same bed does not guarantee relationship success (if only it were that easy!). Likewise, it is a misconception that sleeping apart signifies a failing relationship. Sleeping apart has been called "sleep divorce". This term is particularly problematic. Framing the choice to sleep separately with the word "divorce" implies something negative and disruptive. It is loaded with connotations of relationship breakdown. However, this may not be the case. Sleeping apart could be a couple's decision to prioritize their own health and well-being.



## *Together or Separate?*

There are valid reasons for couples to sleep in the same bed:

- Emotional connection
- Security
- Comfort
- Health concerns
- They rest better together

Conversely, there are reasons to sleep separately:

- Differing sleep-wake schedules
- Preferences for different sleeping environments (e.g., one person is always hot while the other is always cold)
- Children and/or pets
- Sleep disorders
- One partner is a particularly light sleeper who wakes up at the slightest movement

If couples do not sleep well together in the same bed, it might be beneficial to explore different sleeping arrangements.

We sleep for one-third of our lives. This is a significant part of our shared existence as a couple. How couples decide to spend this time—*together or apart*—is a personal decision. Ideally, this decision should be made together. The most effective approach involves shared decision-making and open, honest communication. It is particularly important for couples who choose to sleep separately to maintain open communication regarding their decision. It is crucial to make sure both partners are comfortable with the arrangement. Moreover, it is important to maintain intimacy and physical closeness, even if these moments do not occur at bedtime.

## *Science Says Your Sleep is Key*

What does science show? Sleep is crucial for maintaining healthy relationships, regardless of whether couples choose to sleep together or separately. Research has shown that sleep significantly impacts our emotions, communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and empathy. All of these things are critical components of strong relationships.<sup>4-6</sup> Sacrificing sleep can impair these crucial relationship skills.

In conclusion, there is no one-size-fits-all sleeping strategy for couples. However, all couples should prioritize getting a good night of sleep. Healthy sleep can strengthen relationships, while sleepless nights can lead to relationship strife.



## References

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