





# Getting a Great Night's Sleep with Wool

Lynn Gillespie

It is no secret that a great night's sleep is important to your health. There have been many recent studies urging adults to get eight hours of sleep each night, if possible. Have you ever wondered if you could maximize those eight hours for the deepest rest possible? Our family farms over 132 acres where we organically grow alfalfa, grass hay, barley, oats and triticale as crops for our animals. We raise East Frisian dairy sheep, cows, pigs and poultry. The sheep are my passion. They are raised with love and kindness, hugged daily and even kissed on occasion. The farm keeps me very, very busy and especially during lambing season, I get very little sleep. Because of this, I was eager to find ways to deepen what sleep I got. It took me by surprise a few years ago when a friend told me I was actually sitting on the answer to my need for deeper and more comfortable sleep—wool bedding. I began learning about the benefits of sheep's wool in the bedroom.

Wool stuffed bedding has been found to lower pulse rates during sleep in a study on the effects of wool bedding versus cotton and synthetic.<sup>1</sup> This is just the beginning of the benefits of using wool bedding over synthetic materials. In the Medical Journal of Australia, the article "Effect of a Fleecy Woolen Underlay on Sleep" states "The use of a fleecy wool underlay enabled sleepers to be more 'settled' and improved their own assessment of sleep quality."<sup>2</sup>

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Just how much more settled sleep can you get by sleeping on wool? That was the question I asked years ago and began to answer for myself. Here are the top three benefits that I found. These benefits have really helped me get a better night's sleep.

## 1. Deeper Sleep

Wool has been found to increase the time of REM sleep as well as lower the resting heart rate of those who sleep surrounded by it. Wool helps maintain a fairly consistent body temperature, providing thermal comfort. This was found in a study on natural wool fabrics in physiotherapy.<sup>3</sup>

The optimum sleeping temperature is 64-68 degrees. Too cold and your body is working hard to warm up. Any hotter and your body will be working to cool down. You can assume that your bedding will make an impact on how comfortable you rest at night. Down and polyester are not as breathable as you need and you will often be too hot. Many of us have had those too-hot nights. I know I have!

You can reduce the "thermal stress" on your body by choosing a more breathable bedding alternative and wool is just the ticket as it is a breathable, warming material.



## 2. Hypoallergenic

Wool is naturally odor and moisture resistant. It is also naturally antibacterial and repels dust mites and fungal growth in ways that the majority of other bedding options cannot. Dust mites and fungal growth in bedding lead to many of the problems experienced by the majority of people who have issues with sleeping. The greatest bedding offender for these issues is your pillow. A pillow is a repository of sweat, dead skin, drool, dust mites and fungi. Robin Wright of *The Washington Post* writes "A 2005 medical study of pillows—said to be the first since 1936—found up to 16 species of fungi in a single pillow. Testing both feather and synthetic pillows that ranged from 18 months to 20 years old, University of Manchester researchers found several thousand spores of fungus per gram of used pillow—a higher count than you'd find on a used toothbrush. A minute's soak in hydrogen peroxide can kill the toothbrush spores; not so with a pillow."<sup>4</sup>

When I switched to using my own flock's wool, fluffed into a pillow, the difference was amazing. The early morning sniffles were a thing of the past, and to think that it was caused by dust mites and fungi in my own pillow. No, thank you!

## 3. Healing

Wool as a natural fiber has also been found to be healing. The same study looking at its effects when used in physiotherapy settings found in cases of diabetes, arthritis and paralysis which used heat therapy, that wool products used alongside the heat therapies extended the healing effects and increased circulation to the skin beyond any other product tested.<sup>3</sup>

Another healing aspect of wool is that the fibers have

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a non-irritating roughness that creates a beneficial mechanical stimulation of the skin. This "micro-massage" stimulates circulation and has been found to diminish the sensation of pain.<sup>5</sup>

For those of you worried about this "roughness," wool truly is non-itchy. I know that a wool sweater might be itchy, but the majority of the "itchy" feeling you get from wool comes from the harsh chemicals used to remove debris from the sheep's fleece during processing. My farm's wool does not have the itch factor that most of the wool you are thinking of has. We do not process our wool with harsh chemicals. Another characteristic that can cause that itchy feeling is the fineness of the wool fiber. Certain breeds of sheep produce a wonderful, fine wool fiber that does not have that itchy feeling for many people. Queensland Institute of Dermatology (QID) has been exploring the role that superfine wool knitwear has in the treatment of chronic dermatitis conditions. A pilot study undertaken in 2012 by the QID<sup>6</sup> has shown that wearing suitably specified fine wool products will not irritate the skin's surface, but in fact was found to benefit those suffering from skin issues such as atopic dermatitis. The theory is that the benefits are from the lanolin in the wool.

Understanding the benefits that wool can provide your sleep routine is helpful. Wool's capacity to counteract temperature changes, its insulation properties and an almost immediate impression of warmth on contact with the skin provide beneficial effects on your thermoregulatory system that will greatly increase the quality of your sleep.

It can be a lot to switch over your bedding when getting started. I recommend beginning with your pillow—this will bring about a huge change quickly. Then you can slowly work toward transitioning the rest of your bedding into a woolly paradise.

When you are looking for any wool bedding, be sure to avoid those that contain the harsh chemicals usually used in processing. My recommendation is to find a small operation that promises that no harsh

chemicals are used and that their sheep are well-loved. As a small operation that creates wool pillows, I believe that if the sheep are treated as family, you will be sure to get a well-loved wool product.

Tonight is the night to deepen the sleep you are getting. Are you ready to get started? I am sure it is high time that you replaced your pillow anyway. Start looking for some wool-filled pillows today to enjoy the best night's sleep possible. €



Author Lynn Gillespie can be found at [www.TheLivingFarm.org](http://www.TheLivingFarm.org).

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