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## What goes on under the covers

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**Some people hit the sack back-to-back. Nothing wrong with that. Other folks are spooners, nudists or sheet thieves. And of course you have your snorers, your cuddlers and your hot-and-cold combos.**

What do they have in common? They're all part of the great, groggy world of bed sharing — a world that social scientists and therapists say is critical in the day-to-day lives of countless couples.

"Sleeping together is the heart of the relationship," says University of Minnesota professor Paul Rosenblatt, author of "Two in a Bed: The Social System of Couple Bed Sharing," SUNY Press, \$23.95, paperback. "A lot of barriers are down. You don't have other activities that normally insulate people from each other. The average couple doesn't talk much during the day, but they talk in bed."

Indeed, separate beds may be fine for some couples, but most twosomes hash out some kind of system for inhabiting one mattress. Not that it's easy or automatic.

There may be pillow-height issues to sort through, or flying elbows. One person may have extraordinarily cold toes, while the other needs absolute dark in order to sleep. For certain, there are shenanigans afoot long after couples call it a night.

"They often identify their sleeping arrangement as a symbolic thing about the state of their relationship," says Jeffrey Kerekes, a licensed clinical social worker in New Haven. "If they have a system that works, OK. But if they don't, then it's important they acknowledge what's going on."

Yet amazingly, little has been written about the sleeping habits of couples. Rosenblatt, who teaches family social science, says that may be because most self-help literature — even about insomnia and snoring — is written for individuals rather than couples.

"It's as though everyone in America sleeps alone," he says.

Rosenblatt interviewed more than 40 couples for his book. He simply asks them about their bed-sharing patterns, and whether they had problems with it or found it to be an easy arrangement.

"You really have to work out a system," he explains. "Do you leave a light on? Which side do you sleep on? How many blankets do you use? Do you tuck the covers in or leave them out? The couples I interviewed had stories about a lot of that stuff."

In fact, Rosenblatt discovered that 15 percent of the couples in his study believe they saved the life of one of the partners because they shared the same bed. It included instances where one partner went into diabetic shock and cases in which one partner was clinically depressed and the other partner kept a nighttime vigil in bed to protect them.

One case involved a couple who are spooners. "The woman had a seizure in bed and the man knew instantly," Rosenblatt says.

Snoring was another recurring situation in the research. "One woman was so upset about her husband's snoring, that one night she straddled him and started strangling him," according to Rosenblatt. "They were laughing about this. Snoring is a hard one to deal with."

Kerekes says some couples take a pragmatic approach to getting sleep, finding creative solutions to accommodate each partner.

"I've seen all kinds of arrangements," Kerekes notes. "I've seen people with separate beds in the same room; I've seen people with separate bedrooms. Or couples who spend half the week at one house and half the week at another house. The important thing is to have a connection between two people."

But it's not a static connection, even for couples who share a bed.

Rosenblatt's research found that people bring their fears, their ailments, their injuries and their insecurities to bed with them. Those things may crop up periodically and go away, or deepen over time.

"I think it can be a model for how to solve other problems in a relationship," Rosenblatt says. "There are lots of issues where a couple compromises, such as the woman who wanted bedding that was attractive, but the guy would say, 'I can't stand all the feminine stuff in the bed where I sleep.' So they reach a compromise. But then, you also have couples who are 20 years into power battles about the bed."

Technology provides relief for some people with divergent sleeping styles. For example, an electric blanket with dual controls can do wonders for certain couples. Another couple in Rosenblatt's book discovered that a cloth bag of rice heated in the microwave solved the problem of cold feet on winter nights.

"With any of these things, people could become really annoyed," Rosenblatt says. "But most people just laughed affectionately about it. They would say, 'I could sleep better if I slept alone, but I don't want to sleep alone.'"

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