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The percentage of women who reported difficulty falling and staying asleep, compared to only 25 percent of men, according to a Statistics Canada study.

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The percentage of people who agree that on most nights they would "rather share my bed with a good sleeper who doesn't snore than a good lover who will keep me up with their snoring," according to an Ipsos-Reid poll of 1,700 married Canadians.

# 'til sleep do

**E**VERY NIGHT AFTER THEIR TWO KIDS go to sleep, Matt Sanner kisses his wife Jean good night, scoots across her queen-size bed and jumps into his double bed. And then he sleeps. Alone.

The couple, happily married for 11 years, decided long ago that life was better when they slept apart. And so the master suite of their home boasts two beds: his and hers.

But don't let the sleeping arrangements confuse you. This isn't a case of marital banishment, Matt explains. The choice is mutual. "When we were first married we slept together, but there are multiple reasons why we sleep apart now," he says. "I snore. I'm a tosser-turner and a heavy sleeper and she's a very light sleeper," he continues. "I'm so conscious about the tossing and turning that it keeps me up and it wakes her up anyway, so then we're both sleepless and miserable." The solution, says Matt, was simple: Sleep apart.

## bed spread

The Sanners aren't alone. A study by the National Sleep Foundation in Washington, D.C., found one in four couples sleep apart. And the U.S. National Association of Home Builders predicts that by 2015 as many as 60 percent of custom-built homes will have two master bedrooms.

The Coopers\* could do with a home like that. Krista and Steve have been married for three years, together for 12 and have two children, Jill, 20, and Colin, 5. They've been sleeping in separate rooms for more than a year. It all started when Steve injured his shoulder and needed to sleep in the spare room. "After a taste of a couple of weeks of sleeping on my own, I could never go back," explains Krista, who adds that she quickly saw the perks: more room, no snoring and none of the extra heat that her husband (who she describes as a "furnace") was giving off. "Work was stressful. Getting a solid night's rest was great!" That rest has only helped their marriage, she adds. "We missed each other, but we were both sleeping and happy every morning."

A study conducted by Dr. Wendy Troxel, an assistant professor of psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine suggests that the adage "a happy wife makes a happy life" is true.

When wives don't get enough sleep, the study found, it could trigger tensions that impact the marriage. Researchers tested the sleep patterns of 32 married couples for 10 nights by monitoring rest and activity cycles. Wives who had trouble sleeping had significantly more "negative" marital interactions the next day. (Interestingly, the sleep issues of husbands rarely impacted the relationship.)

While the research may suggest that sleep is necessary for the health of a relationship, there are still many who bristle at the idea of sleeping apart from their spouse. But Doone Estey, a parent educator and partner with Parenting Network, a resource for parents in Toronto, says sleeping apart shouldn't necessarily indicate a relationship is going south. "There are lots of people who sleep in the same bed and don't have a healthy relationship," she points out. "I think the most important thing is how the parents treat each other when they're awake. And if they have a strong, respectful, loving relationship, I think where they sleep is not crucial to a healthy relationship, as long as the kids see that there's affection there."

Still, the Sanners say they often find themselves having to defend their choice. "When we have people over and they're upstairs to see the kids or something like that and go by our bedroom and see two separate beds, I almost feel like I've got to apologize and be like, 'It's okay, we're doing fine in our marriage! I promise,'" says Matt. The truth, they say, is that they are compatible, just not when it comes to sleeping.

Jo-Anne Wallace and husband Hugh feel the same way. Married with two kids, they say his snoring combined with her light sleeping weren't a good match. Testing also revealed that Hugh suffers from sleep apnea. When the choice came down to Hugh having an operation that might affect his sense of taste or forcing him to sleep with a machine to keep his airways open, which would help reduce his snoring, the couple weren't interested in either option and elected to sleep apart instead.

And despite Krista and Steve having to explain their decision to friends ("I tell them it's the best thing and I really think that they, too, one day will be sleeping



# us part

Parents who snooze solo say life is better when you don't share the sheets

BY HEATHER GREENWOOD DAVIS

in separate beds”), their arrangements haven't changed. Krista, who has had to take sleeping pills for years, is now sleeping without them. “Now, I don't need anything—just a cool, quiet room,” she says.

## your place or mine?

The assumption that most often raises an eyebrow is the one that people are usually too embarrassed to ask, the couples say. But they want you to know that just because they aren't sleeping together, that doesn't mean they aren't *sleeping together*. “I would say the opposite,” says Matt. “I have a well-rested wife. A tired wife has a much lower libido than a well-rested wife. I like my well-rested wife.”

Krista agrees. “With two kids in the house, there isn't a whole lot of sex going on, but we do hook up on weekends for weekend sleeps and sex together. It's nice to cozy up and snuggle and wrap our legs around each other, but a couple of hours later, I'm like, okay, you can go downstairs now,” she laughs. And, she adds, “The bed does not become the focal point of sex. You can have sex anywhere.”

The rest also makes for better parenting decisions, says Matt. “We've seen in our lives a very direct correlation. When you're tired, it's harder to parent well. When you're fatigued your tolerance is lower, you snap more, you parent in a way that you later regret. It's just like when the kids are tired and they get whinier in the evening and you realize, ‘Oh, they missed their nap!’ As grownups we are the same way. If I'm rested, it's much easier for me to handle the situation with an even tone and level head. If we're tired, it becomes a bigger battle and things get escalated.”

Krista says the arrangement has made her a better parent, too. “We are open and honest about our relationship with our kids. They understand. They can see that we are so in love. There are no adverse effects. If you are comfortable with your relationship and you love one another, there is no sadness or longing or feeling alone or sex deprivation. It's only sleep!”

And all the couples say they make efforts to make sure that non-sexual intimacy isn't affected by their nighttime arrangements either. “Like any couple,

we've been through our marital problems, but one thing we try to work on is making sure we either start or end the night in the same bed,” says Matt. “She might be just laying there doing a crossword puzzle and I'm checking emails on my smart phone, but we're together until we're both too tired and then I kiss her good night, walk over to my bed and we sleep.”

Similarly, Jo-Anne points out that for her this isn't a case of “his and her” rooms. There is one master bedroom and Hugh's clothes, magazines and things remain in it.

“It's our room. I just sleep here,” she says.

## questions from the kids

In the Wallace house, Jo-Anne says that since she and Hugh usually start the night together and he usually returns in the morning to get dressed, the kids aren't really aware of the sleeping arrangements. At eight and five, the Sanner kids also have yet to voice any curiosity about their parents' sleeping arrangement. If there's a thunderstorm or bad dream that sees them running for their parents' bedroom, they simply crawl up under the covers of the bed of the parent they need in that moment. (“They usually choose mom and then she'll whisper, ‘Go see Dad,’” Matt laughs.)

But Estey says the day may come when the kids have questions, and how parents who handle it will play a large role in how the kids process the information. The arrangement may seem perfectly normal to a child until they hear something from their peer group that suggests otherwise. “It's like kids who grow up in a family where there is a same-sex relationship. To them it's totally normal until someone says, ‘Why do you have two dads and no mom?’ And then they have to start putting it all together and figuring out structure and rules and why their family is different and that takes a little bit of work,” she explains.

Her advice? Hold off on delivering the information until a child asks about why they are sleeping apart, but if you do sense that there might be an issue, check in with the kids and deflate it. “If the kids sense tension in the relationship that's one thing, but if Daddy just moved to a different bedroom because he snores too much, there isn't enough room, opposing schedules



etc., then that's different because the kids see the parents together during the day and they see that the relationship hasn't changed,” she says. “Just casually mention it from time to time so the kids get used to it and they know there's nothing to be ashamed of, nothing to hide,” says Estey.

Krista admits her kids thought the arrangements were weird at first, but it's fine now. “Trust me. My son knows exactly where to find us at nighttime on weekdays and weekends when he needs us.” CF

*Heather Greenwood Davis is a freelance writer. She is currently travelling around the world with her husband (a snoring snuggler) and two young sons.*