

## Green property: going organic in the bedroom

Sarah Lonsdale tests the latest 'eco' products and sorts the fads from the finds. This week: going organic in the bedroom .



Jess Allen on her organic mattress Photo: JOHN LAWRENCE

By Sarah Lonsdale

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Jess Allen, a dancer, was devastated when she was diagnosed with psoriatic arthritis. The condition, which causes painful swelling in the toe and finger joints, meant for a while that she had to give up contemporary dance, which was her profession and her love.

She was prescribed a drug regime but Jess, 33, who has a PhD in biotechnology, was wary of taking potent medication with side effects including liver damage. "I tried to manage my illness by changes to my lifestyle and minimising toxins in my environment, as autoimmune disorders of this kind are sensitive to environmental factors," she says.

Already living a low-chemical life – she uses only [natural cleaners](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/3352786/Greenpiece-dishing-the-dirt-on-home-cleaners.html) (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/3352786/Greenpiece-dishing-the-dirt-on-home-cleaners.html>) and eats organic food – Jess turned to the "elephant in the room", her old, cheap, bed mattress. "I've always needed a good night's sleep, ever since I can remember," she says, "but I made a connection between getting a good night's sleep and my symptoms – the better I slept, the fewer my symptoms and I never slept well on my old mattress."

[How to have a healthier home \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/greenproperty/3364280/Eco-homes-How-to-have-a-healthier-home.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/greenproperty/3364280/Eco-homes-How-to-have-a-healthier-home.html)

[Green property: solar thermal systems \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/greenproperty/7760365/Green-property-solar-thermal-systems.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/greenproperty/7760365/Green-property-solar-thermal-systems.html)

[Britain's greenest schoolchildren \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/greenproperty/7844497/Green-property-Britains-greenest-schoolchildren.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/greenproperty/7844497/Green-property-Britains-greenest-schoolchildren.html)

[Recycled and refashioned furniture \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/greenproperty/7733740/Green-property-recycled-and-refashioned-furniture.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/greenproperty/7733740/Green-property-recycled-and-refashioned-furniture.html)

[Green property: heat pumps \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/greenproperty/7706351/Green-property-heat-pumps.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/greenproperty/7706351/Green-property-heat-pumps.html)

[Green property: floor insulation \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/greenproperty/7887281/Green-property-floor-insulation.html\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/property/greenproperty/7887281/Green-property-floor-insulation.html)

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Jess decided to make a big investment and buy an organic mattress – one that has not been treated with chemical flame retardants and which is made from organic cotton, wool and coir (coconut fibre).

Although most conventional mattresses pass the fire safety test (BS7177) due to being treated with chemical flame retardants, it is possible to pass the safety test without chemicals by creating a mattress dense enough, using wool.

“Wool is naturally fire retardant and needs to get up to 600F/315.5C before it even starts to char,” says Rhiannon Rowley who makes organic mattresses by hand at her workshop in Ammanford in Wales. “We started making mattresses for friends but now sell hundreds of mattresses a month, mostly to the UK. We use British wool and organic cotton. I’m passionate about wool, it’s a great British product and we simply don’t use it as much as we used to.”

The organic cotton used in the mattresses may not make any difference to British consumers – any chemicals used on the crops are washed away by the time it reaches the shops – but it helps cotton farmers in Africa and Asia, where acute pesticide poisoning from non-organic cotton production is an occupational hazard.

“Many pesticides banned in Europe are still permitted in developing countries,” says Phil Monday, of the Pesticides Action Network. “The main reason why British retailers such as Marks & Spencer and John Lewis stock organic cotton is customer demand so it’s up to consumers to ask for organic cotton.”

The price difference is not huge – a John Lewis white cotton double fitted sheet is £15, an organic fair trade one is £19.

Jess Allen spent £1,000 on a new king-size organic mattress (from [www.welovesleep.co.uk](http://www.welovesleep.co.uk) (<http://www.welovesleep.co.uk>)), takes valerian tea at bed time and sprinkles lavender oil, a herbal remedy for insomnia, on her pillow, and says her sleep has improved greatly. “I spend nine hours a night in bed and I don’t want a mattress to be off-gassing all night. My condition has improved hugely although I can’t say for sure that

it's down to fewer chemicals or just getting a better night's sleep.”

Mary McNichol, a qualified teacher from north London, also bought an organic mattress after suffering health problems related to not sleeping properly. “It took me a year to research and find a decent one,” she says. “I didn't want, for example, one with memory foam as polyurethane foam can affect people like me who suffer from asthma and other respiratory problems. Now I am sleeping better I'm finding my symptoms have improved, too.”

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Organic mattresses and bedding from [www.welovesleep.co.uk](http://www.welovesleep.co.uk) (<http://www.welovesleep.co.uk>) ; cot mattresses start from £135, pocket-sprung adult mattresses from £695; to help celebrate Organic Fortnight next month (September 3-17), We Love Sleep is offering a 10 per cent discount on organic sleep products.

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For a directory of organic fabrics: [www.pan-uk.org/Projects/Cotton/Directory/OnlineShops/Fabric.php](http://www.pan-uk.org/Projects/Cotton/Directory/OnlineShops/Fabric.php) (<http://www.pan-uk.org/Projects/Cotton/Directory/OnlineShops/Fabric.php>)

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Handmade organic mattresses from [www.abacaorganic.co.uk](http://www.abacaorganic.co.uk) (<http://www.abacaorganic.co.uk>)

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