

## Don't Get Bugged in Bed

Long before notorious bloodsuckers like Dracula and his vampire bat kin haunted people's dreams, a tiny lesser-known creature was making a bloodthirsty feast of bedtime. Those demons, the bed bugs, continue to prey on innocent victims to this day.

Scientifically known as *Cimex lectularius*, bed bugs are tiny insects that feast at night on the blood of humans and other mammals. In daytime, bed bugs typically situate themselves in the very places where people sleep. Their tiny bodies are able to fit in the narrowest of spaces, including mattresses, box springs and headboards. Unlike social insects like ants and bees, bed bugs do not congregate in a single area.

Human beings have always dealt with the problem of bed bugs. These ancient struggles have been documented in writings about medieval Europe and classical Greece during the time of Aristotle. Including human victims, bed bugs were also known to feast on wild hosts including bats and birds.

The problems associated with bed bugs became widespread prior to WWII, when there was little focus on proper hygiene and personal cleanliness. With the use of various pesticides throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the bugs all but vanished. However, a greater understanding of the risks associated with pesticide use has created a reform in the acceptable chemicals used in pest control and. As a result, bed bugs are once again finding their unwelcome place in society.

### Big Bugs

An adult bed bug is often mistaken as a tick or cockroach. In maturity, bed bugs are approximately ¼ inch in length with flat, hard, oval-shaped bodies. These insects can move swiftly over floors, walls, ceilings and other surfaces. They are wingless, and unable to fly. Female bed bugs can lay as many as 500 eggs during their lifespan and choose secluded areas to nest. When the eggs hatch, the nymphs or baby bugs will fully develop in approximately one month. In cooler areas, or places without blood to feed, the maturity time will be prolonged. Nymphs can live for several months without feeding, while the adults can last for around a year.

### Bite Me

Humans in deep sleep are prime targets of bed bugs. It is possible that you may not even notice that you are being bitten, as the entire feeding process can take as little as one to three minutes. Normally, bed bug victims won't even know that they were bitten until red welts or itchy bumps appear a day or two later.

People that travel frequently, sleep in used beds or do not regularly clean their beds may be prone to bed bug infestation. While it's believed that these pests do not pose a threat of serious disease, there may complications from bed bug bites. If you have experienced such bits, use antibiotic cream or apply an antiseptic to the infected area of the body. The bites will be itchy, but try not to scratch. This only worsens the infection.

### Bug Out

Bed bugs are nothing new. They've been causing problems for many centuries, and a fast and easy remedy has yet to be developed. Your best course of action in the fight against bed bugs is to hire a pest control professional. Those with experience in this industry will know where the bugs settle. They'll know where to look for the little buggers, and how to get rid of them. You can help make their jobs a little easier by cleaning away excess clutter in the area. The inspectors should check every room, as bed bugs will travel to other areas of the home.

### Buy a New Bed

It may be necessary, as a last resort, to dispose of the bed. The mattress and bed frame are the main breeding ground for these insects. Any holes or tears in the mattress, or even the tiniest crevice in the frame, likely contain bed bug eggs. If your bed is heavily infested or in poor shape, the pest control company may advise you to replace it.

Bed bugs aren't choosy about where they live. Any spot with a warm body will do. Bed bugs can be found in sleeping bags, foam pads and even stacks of cardboard on the floor. Any place where people sleep is the perfect living, feeding and breeding environment for bed bugs. Waterbeds, with their warm temperatures and many nooks and crannies, are the perfect spot for bed bugs to thrive.

Despite the measures that we have for dealing with bed bugs, it appears that these pests are here to stay. Your best defense is to practice common sense about your personal hygiene and cleanliness within your home. If you suspect that you may have bed bugs, call a professional exterminator immediately to take care of the problem before it becomes a full-blown infestation.