

The New-Mattress Off-Gassing Guide

Practical, not alarmist — from Embr, an independent, no-affiliate research publication on sleep-environment chemistry.

The honest version: Off-gassing (the VOCs a new foam mattress releases) is a real phenomenon, but for most people sleeping on certified foam in a ventilated room it is **not a crisis**. Here's how to handle it sensibly.

What it is

The smell from a new foam mattress is volatile organic compounds (VOCs) releasing from the foam. Emissions **peak when the mattress is new** and decline steeply over the first days — the fastest drop is right at the start.

A nuance most articles miss

Body heat matters. A mattress warmed by a sleeping body for eight hours re-drives emissions, so the "it's gone in three days" story is incomplete — the foam keeps emitting at a lower level in use. That's why **ongoing ventilation**, not just the first airing, is the real lever.

What to actually do — 3 tiers

Tier 1 — New mattress (everyone): Air it out **48–72 hours before sleeping on it**, in a room with real airflow (not a sealed bedroom). This captures the steep peak when emissions and the smell are dropping fastest.

Tier 2 — Ongoing (everyone): Sleep with **actual fresh-air ventilation** when conditions allow — cracking a window or running a fan that draws outside air — not just HVAC recirculation. Overnight, a closed room accumulates emissions; modest air exchange measurably lowers what you breathe.

Tier 3 — Sensitive groups (young children in small rooms, pregnant individuals, documented chemical sensitivity, high occupational exposure): Do Tiers 1–2, plus consider foam certified to the **most stringent** emissions standards (not just CertiPUR-US), mattress types with **less polyurethane foam**, consistent fresh-air ventilation, and **activated-carbon air purification**. All proportionate, none dramatic.

The certification gap

CertiPUR-US tests VOCs at 72 hours only — a new-foam snapshot. It doesn't measure the long-term, body-warmed emissions described above. The seal isn't meaningless; it just answers a narrower question than most buyers assume.

The full timeline, the studies behind it, and the "is memory-foam off-gassing harmful?" calibrated answer are at embrsleep.com/articles/off-gassing. No affiliate links, ever.

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