Waterbed Encyclopedia Article

Waterbed

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Although an early mention of a waterbed was made in a 1961 science fiction novel by Robert A. Heinlein--*Stranger in a Strange Land* --the concept was not practically applied until 1965, when two Tufts University physicians, Dr. James Weinstein and Dr. Barry Davidson, designed a water-filled mattress for use with hospital patients.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the waterbed gained popularity, beginning in the young, "hippy" culture and gradually working its way into mainstream American society. The bed was proclaimed ideal for both sleeping and sex, although its detractors claimed it a hazard because of its weight (about 1800 lb [817 kg]) and the possibility of leakage or--worse yet--electrocution. Nevertheless, such devotees as Playboy magnate Hugh Hefner (who covered his with Tasmanian opossum fur) continued to promote the advantages of the waterbed, and in 1984 U.S. sales reached $3.4 million. Waterbeds are now available with a layer of mylar sheeting which absorbs body heat and makes use of an electric heater unnecessary.