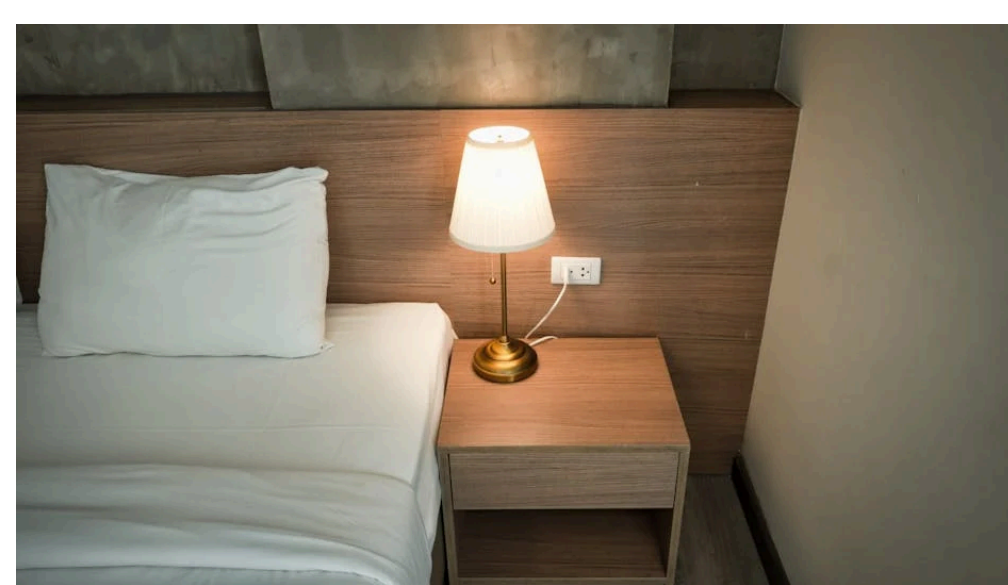


If you wake up with a dull ache in your shoulder or find yourself grimacing every time you reach for your water glass or phone, your furniture layout is likely the culprit. After 20 years of helping UK homeowners navigate everything from Victorian terrace alcoves to modern apartment box rooms, I have seen one recurring issue: the "reach-and-strain" epidemic. Many people treat nightstands as purely decorative, but if the height doesn't align with your sleeping surface, you are essentially performing a weighted shoulder lift every time you go to bed.



In this guide, we are going to look at the ergonomics of bedside reach, how to measure your space correctly, and why "about right" is never good enough when it comes to your joint health.

## The Physics of Bedside Strain

When you are [amumreviews.co.uk](http://amumreviews.co.uk) lying in bed, your shoulder is in its most vulnerable position for repetitive strain. If your nightstand is too high, you are forced to hunch or hike your shoulder upward to reach for your belongings. If it is too low, you are straining your rotator cuff by reaching downward and outward. While the **National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)** focuses on industrial ergonomic standards, these principles apply equally to the home: repetitive, non-neutral reaching leads to musculoskeletal discomfort.

You want your hand to fall naturally onto the surface of the nightstand without needing to engage your shoulder or back muscles. This is what we call the "neutral reach zone."

## The Golden Rule: The 5–10 cm Drop

The secret to a pain-free bedtime routine is simple: your bedside table surface should sit **5 to 10 cm below the top of your mattress**. This allows you to reach out and down slightly, which is the most ergonomic position for your arm when lying in a supine or side-lying posture.

If your table is level with the mattress, you risk knocking things over. If it is higher than the mattress, you will inevitably end up with that shoulder strain you are trying to avoid.

## Step 1: The Essential Measurement

Before you buy anything from **Petalwood Interiors** or browse the latest style guides on [amumreviews.co.uk](http://amumreviews.co.uk), you must get your numbers. Do not guess. Grab your **tape measure** and follow these steps:

1. Sit on the edge of your bed, just where you normally sleep.
2. **Measure floor to mattress top at head of bed.** Make sure you measure the very top of the pillow-top if you have one —don't stop at the base.
3. Record this number in centimetres (e.g., 62 cm).
4. Subtract 5 to 10 cm from that number. This is your target nightstand height range (e.g., 52 cm to 57 cm).

# Why Bed Type Matters

Not all beds are created equal. A low-profile platform bed sits much closer to the floor than a traditional divan with castors or a deep, hotel-style pillow-top mattress.

Bed Type	Typical Mattress Height (cm)	Ideal Nightstand Height (cm)
Platform Bed	45–50 cm	35–45 cm
Standard Divan	55–60 cm	45–55 cm
Pillow-Top/High Frame	65–75 cm	55–65 cm

## The Pillow-Top Complication

I see this all the time in UK master bedrooms: a client buys a luxury pillow-top mattress, adding a massive 30 cm of depth, but keeps their old IKEA nightstand. Suddenly, they are reaching "up" to grab their glasses, putting immense pressure on the shoulder capsule. When you upgrade your mattress, you must re-calculate your furniture height. If your new mattress is 10 cm thicker than your old one, your nightstand height is effectively 10 cm too low.

## Ergonomics and Shoulder Reach: What to Watch For

To avoid shoulder strain reaching your nightstand, consider your arm position lying down. When your arm is resting by your side, your elbow should be slightly bent. Your hand should be able to hover over the nightstand surface with the forearm parallel to the floor or angled slightly downward.



If you have to lift your elbow higher than your shoulder level, or if you have to stretch your arm out fully to reach your phone, you are outside of the safe ergonomic zone. This "long reach" is a primary cause of impingement-like pain.

## Rental-Friendly Fixes for Height Mismatches

If you are in a rental or can't afford to replace your existing nightstands, don't worry. There are ways to adapt:

- **For a table that is too low:** Use decorative risers or heavy-duty furniture feet to lift the unit. I have seen clever homeowners use solid wooden blocks painted to match the unit.
- **For a table that is too high:** This is harder to fix. If it is only 2-3 cm off, consider switching to a thinner mattress topper or a different style of bed frame. If it is significantly too high, it is time to look for a wall-mounted floating shelf that you can install at the correct, ergonomic height regardless of the floor-standing furniture footprint.

## Final Thoughts: Don't Compromise on Comfort

Your bedroom is a place for recovery, not for developing chronic pain. By taking five minutes with your **tape measure to measure floor to mattress top at head of bed**, you can eliminate the mechanical cause of your shoulder tension. Remember: the furniture should fit the human, not the other way around. Keep your essentials within that 5–10 cm reach zone, and your shoulders will thank you every morning.

Have you measured your setup yet? Let me know your current heights in the comments—I'm happy to help you troubleshoot your specific setup to see if you fall within the healthy range.