

# Analyze family's furniture needs

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Before you buy furniture, first determine your needs. Do you have a rough and tumble family? Will it receive heavy or light use? Will your pets be on the furniture? How much do you want to spend? Do you want this piece to last for a long time or do you plan to replace it in a few years? Is your room large or small? Do your rooms receive a lot of sunlight? Will furniture be fairly easy to move?

These questions need to be answered whether you want to buy a sofa, a table, or a chair. Your lifestyle and your budget can match what you buy, if you shop carefully and ask questions. Make a scale drawing of your room to take shopping with you. Where should you buy? Always buy from a reputable dealer. It's familiar advice, but how do you recognize one? Ask your friends. Ask the Better Business Bureau.

ASK THE DEALER what services he offers. You can choose from a wide variety of store types. Does the store specialize in furniture? Remember that where you have credit, the cost are usually higher.

Are there service guarantees? Do they charge for delivery or is it included in the price? Do they have and/or do they charge for layaway? What about polishing and touching up furniture after delivery? Many stores send it out in the crates.

Ask about interior design service before, not after, you buy. Decide which services are essential to you for this purchase, but remember, you cannot expect the same service from a discount store that you will get from a full service store.

What should you look for in upholstery? Good tailoring; straight seams; no puckering; buttons securely attached; no loose threads; top to bottom; matched fabric patterns; the frame itself should not be felt from the outside. Should be attached securely to the frame with corner blocks for bracing and check for the law label for the content of cushion materials.

Is there a warranty on fabric and on metal mechanisms in recliners and sofa beds?

Try it out, sit down and get up several times. Is it high enough? Low enough, sit three for a few minutes (don't feel silly, you'll sit for longer than that at home). Is it too soft or too hard? Will it be scratchy or sticky in summertime?

Ask about the cushion construction. What is it and will it keep in shape? Find out about the kind of springs and see if they squeak. If you're considering a sofa bed, make sure you can open and close it easily. Don't forget to lie down on the mattress to test its comfort. What about the fabric?

Most textile mills do not guarantee upholstery fabric to the furniture manufacturer, so consider your selection with care.

Now look back to your needs. How will this piece of furniture be used? as a trampoline by active kids or for afternoon tea by auntie and grandma?

The wearing quality and surface appearance of fabric is influenced by the fiber, weave, and finish of the materials used. Long threads in materials such as satin and brocade may snag or break. Nubby threaded fabrics may also snag. Out pile fabrics such as velvet will change slightly in color when their naps are brushed different directions.

If you're considering vinyl, remember that body oils and moisture can sometimes have a hardening effect on the man made material.

At the store, check for:

- Closeness of weave. Generally, the closer the weave, the more durable the fabric.
- Possible pilling. Take a pencil eraser and rub briskly on the fabric sample. If bits of fabric come off, the fabric may shed fibers.
- Sturdy backing. Rub the sample fabric together. Is it well bonded to the fabric? Does it flake off?
- Fiber content. Natural, man-made and blended fabrics are available today. Each has advantages. Discuss them with your retailer.
- Always remember your needs. Consider how well the upholstery fabric will stand up under daily use in your home. In general, tightly woven fabrics wear better than loosely woven fabrics light-weight fabrics such as linens and cottons. A medium color or all over pattern will show fabric dirt less. You might also find that if the fabric has been treated with a protective finish that helps repel dirt.

What about wood furniture?

Look it over. Most wood furniture has no written guarantee. Be sure to give it the critical eye before you purchase. Don't be shy. Inspect it all over. Check for:

- Uniform finish. Does the finish look the same all over. Rub the surface. Is it smooth?
- Careful gluing. Good glues are so strong they can outlast wood. In fine furniture excess glue has been wiped off.
- Corner blocks (triangular pieces of wood screwed and glued to support and reinforce the corners of the frame).
- Joints that fit tightly.
- A leveling mechanism to adjust the furniture to the evenness of your floor.
- Drawers that fit snugly in the frame.
- Drawers that open and close effortlessly. Try closing the drawer by pushing it in from one corner.
- Drawers that are smooth on the inside.
- Drawers sides and backs are at least one-half inch thick.
- Casters on large pieces to help you move it easily.

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