



Are you buying new carpet? What about the cushioning underneath?

You love the carpet you have just chosen, next the salesperson is asking you about the Carpet Cushion also commonly known as Carpet Underlay. You're thinking "just give me something good". Be careful, as not all carpet cushion is created equal! Carpet cushion plays a critical role in your carpet's comfort, performance and appearance, so getting the choice right is vital.

So what information do you need to consider before you choose the carpet cushion that is right for you?

Firstly a good place to start is to understand what carpet cushion does. The main purpose of carpet cushion is to provide long-term comfort and protection for your carpet. It also offers a variety of extra benefits such as:

- Creating a softer 'walk' or feel to the carpet.
- Provides thermal insulation keeping your house warmer.
- Dampens sound.
- Helps you clean your carpet more efficiently.

When choosing your carpet cushion think about the type and amount of traffic your floor will be subject to. If you stand a lot or have kids who play indoors, consider denser more supportive cushioning. If you have pets in your home you may want antimicrobial protection against mould, bacteria or dustmites. Does someone in your home use a wheelchair or other mobility devices? Wheelchairs, walkers etc. may be affected and do not work well on soft or thick carpet cushion, so you may need to consider a heavier commercial type for these particular situations.

What type of carpet cushion should I use?

The two most common types of materials used to manufacture carpet cushion are rebonded foam chip and rubber. Each type comes with its own grading scheme. In NZ the most common type of carpet cushion sold for residential homes is rebonded foam chip.

Rebonded Foam Chip

Residential foam chip carpet cushion is typically graded by density and thickness. It is predominantly made from post industrial offcuts generated in the manufacture of foams for the furniture and bedding industry. The density tends to vary between 80kg and 130kg per cubic metre, and the thickness between 8mm and 11mm. The density / thickness along with the quality of the foam used delivers the feel that the carpet cushion is going to deliver.

A basic guide to follow is that the higher the density and the thickness the more luxurious the feel will be.

Rubber

Residential rubber carpet cushion is typically of the waffle variety but not very common now in NZ due to its cost / relative performance to rebonded foam chip versions. There are also slab-rubber types which are typically used in commercial applications. In general terms the grading of most rubber waffle carpet cushion could be said to be basic, better, best and this is determined by the higher amount of rubber latex used in the backing of the underlay. Avoid cheap versions of rubber, as clay fillers may have been used to keep the manufacturing costs down; in time these products do not perform and may leave you disappointed with the long term outcome.

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Are all carpet cushions manufactured to the same standard?

The carpet cushion you are looking at purchasing should comply with New Zealand's recognised standard for the manufacturing of soft underlays AS 4288:2003 – Soft underlays for textile floor coverings. Make sure you ask for evidence that the product you are buying complies with this standard. If the carpet cushion/underlay you are being sold does not comply with this standard, it can impact the performance, longevity and comfort of your carpet. This also makes sure you are getting what you are paying for.

Can I re-use my existing carpet cushion under my new carpet?

The short answer to this question is NO! Reusing existing carpet cushion/underlay when you replace your old carpet may void

your new carpet warranty as most carpet manufacturers state that their carpet must be installed to the industry standard AS/NZS 2455.1:2007 – Textile floor coverings – Installation practice which states “The soft underlay shall have a service life no shorter than that of the textile floor covering in accordance with the recommendations of the underlay manufacturer and the carpet manufacturer” and “Carpet should never be laid over existing carpet and/or existing underlay as this can cause permanent damage to the new floor covering installation”.

So don't succumb to any advice given by someone stating that the old carpet cushion/underlay looks fine. The old cushion will exhibit the same wear patterns as the old carpet, especially in the main traffic areas so you may be putting at risk the performance of your new carpet and your warranty!

In the end it is your choice what you put under your expensive new carpet. The better the quality the more likely you are going to be happy with the long term outcome, so make sure you try the carpet cushion you are considering under your carpet of choice. A slightly more supportive carpet cushion is going to be better long term, than options that feel on the softer side. Take time to make sure you get the right product so that you get the years you expect out of your carpet choice.

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