

HEALTHY LIVING



Sleep Ergonomics

“Sleep ergonomics” refers to our postures and positions during sleep—which either help us rest safely and comfortably or stress joints to the point that we wake up with more aches and pains than we fell asleep with. Sleeping positions matter. Poor-quality sleep is proven to negatively affect overall health.

Positions to Reduce Back Pain

It is possible to take strain off your back by making simple changes in your sleeping position. The healthiest sleeping position is on your side. If that is how you sleep, draw your legs up slightly toward your chest and put a pillow between your legs. Some people even use a full-length body pillow to help maintain balance. Try not to put weight on your arms. This causes circulatory problems and a related pins-and-needles sensation. Instead, try crossing them in a braced position. (If tingling persists, talk to your doctor of chiropractic about other potential causes and options.)

If you sleep on your back, it is best to place a pillow under your knees to help maintain the normal lower back curvature. You might try placing a small rolled towel under the small of the back for more support. Be aware that sleeping on your stomach is generally not the best for your back. In this position, the cervical spine undergoes considerable strain, which can cause nerve compression, muscular imbalance and muscle pain. If you can't sleep any other way, reduce the strain on your back by placing a pillow under your pelvis and lower abdomen. Also place a pillow under your head if it doesn't cause back strain. Otherwise, try sleeping without a head pillow.

Mattresses and Pillows

Your mattress and pillow should support your body in its natural position, allowing it to rest and recover from the day's activities. The best mattresses are designed to conform to the spine's natural curve and keep the body in alignment. Beyond that, your mattress choice is highly subjective. You must find the one that works best for you. Look for one that is firm enough to support your spine in a side-lying position, but soft enough that it feels good to your skin. A mattress that is too firm may irritate bony prominences of the hips and shoulders.

Mattress Maintenance

To prevent uneven wear, manufacturers have traditionally recommended flipping or rotating a mattress every few months. That may still work for some models; however, many newer mattresses are made to be slept on one side only, and still others are designed to provide specific support to the head and upper body compared with the lower body. In such cases, even turning the mattress would not be advised. Make sure you know the recommendations for your specific mattress.

If possible, replace your mattress after five to seven years of regular use. If you feel springs, bumps or dips beneath the surface when you are lying on the bed, or you unintentionally roll toward the middle of the bed, it's time to go shopping for a new mattress. A worn-out mattress can reduce quality of sleep and make back problems worse. You may also find that the mattress is to blame for insomnia if you find yourself sleeping better when you are away from home—in a hotel, for example.





Ergonomic Pillows

An ergonomic pillow is designed to accommodate the user's sleeping position and to minimize any associated tension that may result from prolonged time spent in one position. Ergonomic pillows are shaped differently from regular pillows. They are often made of foam or similar form-retaining material that offers greater support.

Most ergonomic pillows are used for sleep, although some are used for lower back support while sitting. They vary in size from small neck pillows used for long car trips or flights to very large full-body pillows, meant to cradle the entire body during sleep.

A healthful pillow is designed to keep the spine in natural alignment, which minimizes stress on the body. Most people do not maintain neutral positions while they sleep. This creates tension at problem spots like the neck and the lower back, resulting in pain in either or both of these areas. An ergonomic pillow can often correct such problems.

A pillow of the wrong size can cause or aggravate neck and shoulder problems. When you sleep on your side, the pillow should fill the space between the head and mattress so that the cervical spine is in line with, and an extension of, the spine. The pillow should support the head, neck and shoulders and adapt to the contours of these areas. This will optimize your sleeping position throughout the night. A pillow also should be hypoallergenic.

Trouble Falling Asleep at Night?

In addition to a comfortable mattress and the right pillow, there are several things you can do to enhance your ability to fall asleep successfully each night. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggestions the following:

- Be consistent. Go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time every day, even on weekends and vacations.
- Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark, relaxing, and at a comfortable temperature.
- Remove electronic devices, such as TVs, computers, and smart phones, from the bedroom.
- Avoid large meals, caffeine, and alcohol before bedtime.
- Be sure to move! Being physically active during the day can help you fall asleep more easily at night.

For more information on prevention and wellness, or to find an ACA chiropractor near you, visit www.HandsDownBetter.org

Additional Resources:

- "Tips for Better Sleep." Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/sleep/about_sleep/sleep_hygiene.html. Accessed Oct. 1, 2020.



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