

SLEEP HYGIENE

Having trouble getting to sleep at night? Waking up with back pain? Here are some simple, yet effective tips to help you get a good night's sleep, while being good to your back and neck in the process.

1. Your bed

A well-made bed is crucial to a healthy nights sleep. The mattress should be soft enough to conform to the contours of your spine and the areas of highest pressure (your shoulder and hip), while remaining firm enough to support your weight without sagging. If you feel that your bed is questionable, there a few things you should try:

- Rotate your mattress and flip it over. This should be done on a regular basis, (i.e., 1 time every three weeks).
- Take your mattress off of your box spring and place it on the floor. Sleep on the mattress, on the floor, for a few days. If your comfort level / quality of sleep improves, then it's not your mattress at fault, but rather your box spring. The solution can be to buy a new box spring or you could place a piece of plywood (preferably $\frac{3}{4}$ inch) between the box spring and mattress, or simply keep the mattress on the floor.
- Sleeping in another bed for a few days to see if this improves your sleep and / or lessens your discomfort.

2. Support your neck

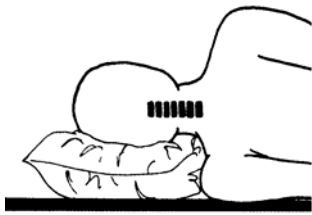
It is very important to support your spines natural curves while you sleep. By supporting your neck as you lie on your back or side, you are cradling the many joints in your neck. Sleeping without a good pillow can place excessive stress on the joints on one side of your neck while placing unnecessary tension on the opposite side. Furthermore, you are taking a great deal of strain off of your muscles by maintaining the natural curve in your neck throughout the night. Your head weighs about 10 – 13 pounds. The only rest your neck muscles get is when you're lying down. That's why, when sleeping it's important to rest them by using a pillow that properly supports your head and helps maintain the natural curve of your neck. A water-based pillow is our preferred choice because it's supportive, doesn't wear out, and can be customized to suit your needs. Ask us more about them and use that old flat one for between your knees when you sleep on your side.



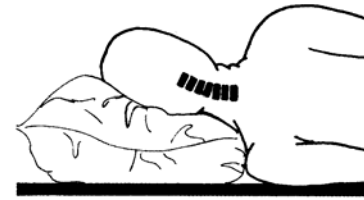
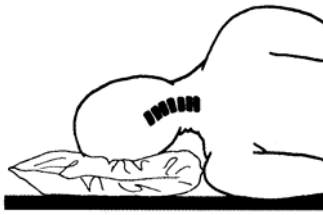
Pillow supporting the natural neck curves.



Pillow flexing neck and placing strain.



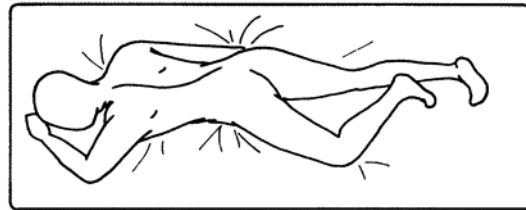
Properly supported neck



Pillow too thin, or thick, resulting in excessive strain on neck

3. **Stay off your stomach**

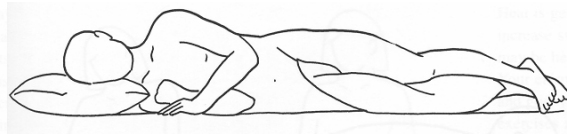
Sleeping on your stomach is very detrimental to the body. This position strains the natural curve of your low back and forces you to twist your neck to one side. Placing a strong, consistent force on the joints of your neck, sleeping on your stomach can actually promote the degeneration of these joints. Additionally, sleeping on your stomach invariably means you'll have your arms above your head, which when done for an extended period of time can wreak havoc on your shoulder joints. Sleeping on your back is best, while sleeping on your side is acceptable provided that you keep your body aligned properly and keeping your knees on top of one another with a pillow in between.



Sleeping on the stomach places strain on the natural curves of the low back and neck.



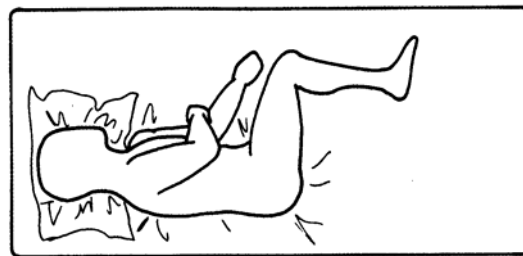
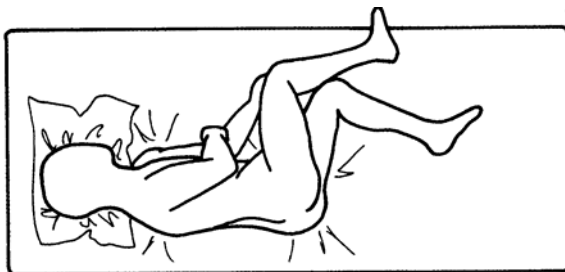
Sleeping on your back is best.



Sleeping on your side is acceptable.

4. **Support your knees**

By placing a pillow between your knees as you sleep on your side, you take a significant amount of stress off of your hip joints and pelvic (sacroiliac) joints. By placing a pillow under your knees while you sleep on your back, you relieve the pressure on your lower back and improve the chances that you'll wake up without aches or pains in your back.



Sleeping on your side with your knees directly on top of each other reduces strain to your hips and pelvis.

TIPS FOR SLEEPING WELL

✦ Avoid distractions

Keep the bedroom for sleeping. Ideally the room should be quiet, dark and comfortable. Desks, televisions, and eating meals in your bedroom all train your subconscious mind to think that the bedroom and sleep don't necessarily go together.

✦ Keep a regular schedule

Going to sleep at the same time each night and waking up at the same time each morning allows your body to become accustomed to a daily cycle that will increase the amount of deep, restorative sleep your body needs. Although it may be tempting to hit the snooze button several times on the weekend, these irregular sleep patterns may in fact be detrimental in the long run.

✦ Let go of the day's thoughts

Stress carried over from the day's activities may result in poor sleep. If your mind is racing as you lie there trying to fall asleep, try one of these two things:

- **KEEP A PEN AND PAD BESIDE YOUR BED.** THIS WAY, YOU CAN WRITE DOWN ALL OF THE THINGS THAT ARE ON YOUR MIND FROM TODAY, AS WELL AS ALL OF THE THINGS THAT YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT FOR TOMORROW. IF YOU WRITE THEM DOWN, THEY'LL BE THERE WHEN YOU WAKE UP, SO YOU CAN FOCUS ON THEM WHEN YOU'RE MOST PRODUCTIVE.
- **GET UP AFTER 30 MINUTES.** IF YOU'VE BEEN LYING IN BED FOR A HALF AN HOUR, AND FEEL AS THOUGH YOU'RE GETTING NOWHERE CLOSE TO A SLEEPING STATE, GET UP AND DO SOMETHING THAT YOU FIND RELAXING. IT MAY BE A BOOK, TELEVISION OR MUSIC. THE IMPORTANT PART IS TO LEAVE YOUR BEDROOM, AND CHANGE YOUR FOCUS TO SOMETHING THAT IS RELAXING TO YOU. WHEN YOU FEEL TIRED, GO BACK TO BED AND TRY AGAIN.

✦ Don't eat too close to bedtime.

It's a proven fact that you will not sleep as well if your body is busy trying to process food that you just ate. When you eat, your metabolism speeds up, and consequently, you sleep less well. Furthermore, if you eat late, then go to bed shortly thereafter, you are promoting the conversion of whatever food you eat to fat! Dinner should be the smallest meal of the day, as you don't burn the calories that you take in nearly as efficiently at night as you do in the morning. Believe it or not, Sumo wrestlers achieve their enormous size by taking naps after every meal, thus promoting the conversion of calories to fat! As well, skip that evening cup of coffee, tea or cola. The stimulating effects of the caffeine in these drinks can last up to 6 hours, thereby compromising your sleep.

⊕ Avoid having a nightcap.

By this, we mean don't have an alcoholic drink before you retire for the night. Researchers have found that alcohol hinders your ability to achieve deep sleep. People who have a drink before bed often feel tired in the morning, because they did not get enough deep, restorative sleep. Research indicates both quality and quantity of sleep is important to both physical and mental health. It is believed that non-REM (rapid eye movement) sleep helps repair cells, rest the body and mind, and boost the immune system while REM sleep helps store memories and consolidate learning.

- AS AN INTERESTING SIDE-NOTE, HORMONAL CHANGES AS WE AGE NEGATIVELY AFFECT THE AMOUNT OF DEEP RESTORATIVE SLEEP THAT WE CAN GET. THIS IS WHY ELDERLY PEOPLE CAN SLEEP VERY OFTEN AND STILL FEEL TIRED, WHILE CHILDREN CAN HAVE A LITTLE NAP AND FEEL TOTALLY RECHARGED.

⊕ Get plenty of rest.

Researchers have also found that there really is no way to “catch up” on missed sleep. The ideal amount of sleep varies for every individual, but a good rule of thumb is to get enough sleep so you don't need to rely on an alarm. Experiment with this, preferably on the weekend!

And remember, **sleep is supposed to be enjoyable!** The primary purpose of sleep is to relax your body and prepare you for the next day's activities, and your body requires certain amounts of it in order to function in a healthy, efficient manner. Try these sleeping tips to help you maximize your potential!

Sweet Dreams!