

Are you Waking Up with Back Pain?

Do you have PAIN that wakes you up at night, or pain in the morning when you wake up from sleeping? If so, you're NOT alone as it is estimated that about 60-85% of people in the U.S. are suffering from back pain in general. Upon waking up from a restful or non-restful night of sleep the last thing you want to feel is some sort of pain, and it could be neck pain, upper back pain or lower back pain. This can occur from how you sleep at night.

Let's just think that if you are not sleeping and you spend about 8 hours of your day sitting or standing in the same position, that position that you are in will start to alter how your back and neck muscles have to react and can lead you down the path of discomfort and pain. I know that during the daytime most everyone, even if you have a desk job, are not sitting in the same position the entire day at work. You have the ability to get up, walk around, stretch your neck and back, and move your body to alleviate any tighter muscles that have been building up during your workday. Looking further into the nighttime sleeping patterns, more than likely you get yourself into a deep sleep or REM pattern, and this allows your body to stay in one position while you're sleeping. This one position is starting to create different patterns on how your muscles, tendons, and ligaments have to react to your posture when sleeping. There are numerous ways and positions that people sleep, different types of beds, soft or harder types of mattresses, mattresses that move up and down, and a multitude of pillows at your fingertips. When you're thinking about how to sleep tonight, there are numerous ways and sleeping positions that you can find yourself in once you are asleep. Some of the BEST sleeping positions that have the least amount of stress put upon the spine, muscles, tendons and ligaments are below:

- Sleeping on your Back – When you're sleeping while lying flat on your back, allows your spine to be perfectly in-line with itself. Lying flat on the back allows your legs to be straight, and this position doesn't add any additional stress to your spine, hips, neck and muscles. Also when sleeping like this you don't want to add a large pillow to put additional strain on the neck muscles putting it into a flexed position causing an angle that can be more stressful to your spine and neck muscles. Your neck is already in a flexed position during the day regardless of what your job is or what you do, it's just the nature of what we do daily that causes this flexed neck position. Sleeping without a large pillow or a pillow that puts your neck into a flexed position not only can give you neck pain, but it pulls the spine and muscles causing you to have tighter neck muscles, tense and tender upper back muscles, and potentially a muscle spasm.
- Sleeping on your Side – While sleeping on your side gives you more opportunity to move your legs, and arms into a more comfortable position, there can be some problems associated with this position. When on your side you want to allow your knees to be in alignment with putting a pillow in-between them, as this will create less stress on the muscles, ligaments and tendons of your hips and lower back to not get stressed and strained during the nighttime. When you don't use a pillow in-between your knees, your knees will be both on the mattress at different angles. These angles could leave you with knee pain, as the ligaments and tendons of the knees will get additional strain due to the angle they are in all night long. Also when your knees are both on the mattress while side sleeping, this opens up your hips and sacro-

iliac joints become stressed and strained leading you down the path to waking up with lower back pain or hip pain.

Now that we have talked about the 2 BEST sleeping positions, let's now discuss some of the WORST positions while sleeping that can lead you down the path of chronic pain not only in the lower back but also in the neck and hips.

- Sleeping on your stomach – When sleeping on your stomach, unfortunately it feels good sometimes as you get to move your head left and right, putting your hands under the pillow and cradling your head to give you what might appear to be a good position and a restful night sleep. Sleeping this way can cause you to have a lot of different types of issues from your neck, back and hips. First when sleeping on your stomach your neck has to be twisted to one side or the other, and this puts a strain on your spine, the nerves and blood vessels that exit the spine, muscles then become stretched on one side and lengthened on the other side, and also a strain on the back muscles as the neck muscles are pulling in different ways from one side to the other. Sleeping like this could potentially give you that problem when you wake up in the morning with a 'crick' in your neck or muscle spasms that will not go away, and leads to limitations when twisting your head left and right, and tighter muscles in the lower back.
- Sleeping where one of your legs are higher compared to the other – This sleeping position where one leg is bent and the other leg is straight puts a twisting motion in your hips and lower part of your spine, which adds additional stress and strain to the lower back muscles, tendons, ligaments, and nerves that exit the spine. This position can lead to tighter leg muscles, and lower back muscles, which will give you that pain in the hips and lower back when you wake up in the morning.
- Sleeping with your legs spread apart – This position is very similar to sleeping on your back, which is one of the BEST positions you can sleep in, but when spreading your legs wide while sleeping this puts stress on your hip joints. Your hips joints are a larger ball and socket joint, and when spreading your legs during sleep all night creates more tension and stress on the muscles, ligaments and tendons around the hip joint itself, and this can cause hip pain, iliotibial (IT) band pain, and overtime it may lead to hip problems in general.
- Sleeping in the fetal position – Some people love to curl up in a ball when they sleep as it gives them a sense of comfort when everything is curled up under the covers. This curled up fetal position puts your spine in a curved position, and creates muscle tension over the nighttime. Your spine has 3 distinct curves from the neck, mid back, and lower back, and when sleeping in a fetal position, this causes your spine to lose the 3 curves and creates 1 big curve. When this occurs all of your muscles, ligaments and tendons that are attached to your spine have to be altered in the way they are situated all night long giving your body additional stress and potential muscle strain over time.

Even when you sleep in the BEST position at night, you can still wake up with some sort of back pain. This also can be caused by the type of mattress you have, as there are a multitude of mattresses out there for purchase and everyone is claiming that their mattress is the best for you to have a great night sleep. Now when looking at mattresses you have to think about this, you spend on average about a 1/3 of your life sleeping. If you have a mattress that is old and worn out, this is not creating the best support for you or your back to get that rested night's sleep. Your old worn out mattress that is soft, sagging in the middle, and more unsupportive than

supportive for your body can leave you tossing and turning all night long trying to find that perfect position where you don't feel any additional stress or strain on your body. This leaves your spine to become twisted and not aligned properly, which can pull your muscles and has more opportunity to tweak all of your muscles that attach to the spine itself. Now all mattresses have some sort of firm concept to them, so it's kind of like the story of Goldilocks and the 3 bears, where you don't want a mattress that is extra soft, which can create sagging in the mattress where you sleep, not a proper type of back support in any position that you sleep, and this inevitably causes you to have some type of back pain. The next would be the one that is way too firm of a mattress, as this can distort your spine and muscles not allowing the proper curves of your spine to be relaxed, and the pressure of this hard mattress puts more strain and pressure on your shoulders, and pelvic area, which can cause your neck to become stiff, achy and sore. The one that you are looking for is that just right type of firm mattress support, where it allows your spine to have proper ability to be alignment, and not put too much pressure on the shoulders and pelvis region. This will allow your body to have proper blood circulation, allowing your muscles and body to relax all night long while you're sleeping.

When looking at mattresses, this is kind of like buying a car, as you will be lying on this mattress every single night for as long as you have it around. So when searching for that perfect mattress, you will have to go out and lay on a bunch of mattress with all different types of sleeping positions, so you can find the correct one that fits your body type and style that you prefer to sleep in.

Another huge thing to consider when sleeping is your pillow, as your head rests on this giving proper support of your neck and cervical spine. Remember you will lay down on this pillow the same amount of time you sleep on your mattress. You will need to evaluate your current pillow, what is the shape of the pillow with your head on it and without your head on it. When getting a good night's sleep, it is essential to have a really good support for your neck to allow your spine, muscles, tendons and ligaments to be able to relax all night long. If your pillow doesn't support your neck and cervical spine properly while you're lying on it, then you will more than likely wake up with some sort of stiff neck, and potentially wake up with a 'crick' in your neck. The pillow you want to look for is one that has some type of contour shape to it, as this will allow your neck to maintain its proper curve when lying on your back, as well as support it properly when lying on your side. This contour shaped pillow will support your neck and spine to become more in a neutral position over night while sleeping. When searching for a pillow, you will have to have the same mindset just like searching for a mattress, you MUST go try a bunch of pillows out and actually lay on them in all of the different positions that you sleep in to determine which pillow is going to be the correct one for you. Everyone has a different shape of neck, muscles that are larger or smaller, some people's necks are longer and others are shorter, so trying out more pillows will actually benefit you and get you the pillow that is 'Just Right' for your neck.

By Jason Mathews with Proline Chiropractic in Bellevue, WA. Please let us know if you'd like their contact information for more details.

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