

## ***Pain in Your Neck? It May Be How You're Sleeping!***

As adults, we put a lot of stress and strain on our bodies. Lifting. Bending. Twisting. And unfortunately, many of us never give a second thought to all the bones and muscles we employ on a daily basis, let alone consider how our waking and sleeping activities might affect them. Take the human spine, for example, that internal line of communication between the brain and the rest of the body. What happens when an activity we expect to be restful and rejuvenating to our neck and spine – a full night's sleep – actually causes more harm than good?

Scientific studies have shown that like so many other parts of the body, the spine benefits greatly from the restorative powers of sleep. Those same studies found that both improper sleep positioning and poor mattress quality can negatively influence the spine's ability to repair and refresh itself.

### ***Why is proper spinal care so important?***

Composed of 24 vertebrae, plus the sacrum and the coccyx, the human spine is a complex network of nerves and bones. It plays a vital role in the way our bodies function, from the number of times we blink each minute, to the way our toes move when we walk. All nerve impulses start in the brain and flow down the spinal cord, which is housed within the safety of the spine. Nerves from the spinal cord pass between the vertebrae of the neck and back, then branch out by the thousands to every other part of the body. Damage to even the smallest of these nerves can have serious, detrimental effects to a person's overall health and well being, and can lead to chronic pain and discomfort.

### ***Keep it straight!***

Now that we've learned a little about how the spine works, let's take a look at some methods to improve spinal health while sleeping as well as some important ways to avoid inflicting further damage.

When considering the best methods for keeping your spine healthy and as pain-free as possible for your age, **support and alignment are key**. It's easy to take for granted how mattress quality can affect the back. Truth be told, no other single piece of furniture is used as often or has the ability to affect your overall health more than the bed you sleep in every night.

A good quality mattress will support your spine and allow you to maintain the same alignment as you would if you were standing. In short, the mattress you choose should keep your spine in a straight line from the neck down. If you sleep on your back, place a pillow under your head and neck, but be sure you don't

sleep with your shoulders on the pillow. This causes improper alignment. The same rule applies if you sleep on your side.

If you're a stomach-sleeper, you might want to change your ways. Research shows that sleeping on your stomach with your head elevated on an oversized pillow stresses the natural curves of the back, increasing pressure on the diaphragm and lungs. This can lead to excessive tossing and turning, and results in a less-than-restful night's slumber.

A good rule of thumb, no matter which position you're in or which type of mattress you're sleeping on, is to always try *not* to let your head sink lower than the rest of your spine.

### ***Give it a rest!***

When you stop to think of the essential role your spine plays in your body's overall health, it's easy to see why giving it a proper night's rest is so critical. Re-evaluate your mattress. Re-think the size of your pillow. Re-examine *how* you sleep each night. These simple activities can go a long way in preventing chronic neck and back pain and erasing unnecessary suffering in the future.

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