



Dr. Shawn A. Schmidt

HOW ARE YOU SLEEPING?

On the average, we spend 1/3 of our lifetime in bed. Because so much of our lives are spent in a bed, what kind of bed, the posture we assume when sleeping, and the type of pillow we use can have a profound effect on our health.

On many occasions when I am doing initial consultations with a new patient, the patient will state that they feel terrible in the morning and they often feel much better after they get up and move around. Typically, a true back problem will get worse as you use your back, not when you are sleeping. Sleeping should be a very low stress activity. This is because the effects of gravity are minimal when lying down and are at their greatest when you are standing or sitting upright.

However, if you are sleeping on a mattress which is just too hard or too soft you are suffering from Goldilocks Syndrome which, is then insurable reimbursable (Ha! Ha!). There are a couple of things that can be done to change the density of your sleeping surface. A simple way of making your bed softer is to add a sheet of eggcrate foam (minimum 2" thickness). These can be purchased at the local Target, K-Mart and Shopko stores. For your convenience, we do have some available at the clinic. For those who suspect their bed is too soft or broken down, adding ½" to 1" plywood between the box springs and mattress can be beneficial.

Many people, however, are sleeping on a mattress which is just too old and broken down, and their only option is to purchase a new one. We typically recommend Sealy, Simmons, and Omaha Bedding mattresses. Be sure that the store offers you a 3 – 4 week trial period in case the mattress is wrong for you. It can then be returned without penalty. Additionally, most mattresses will have about 10-15 years of good support. If you consistently awaken with back pain, your mattress is too old and needs to be replaced.

Another source of spinal problems is sleeping posture. The best position in which to sleep is on your back or side. Lying on your stomach is typically the worst position! This is the case for three reasons: 1) Stomach sleeping requires you to lie with your head



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turned to one side for prolonged periods. This creates tension in the joints, nerves, and muscles of the neck contributing to chronic neck pain, stiffness, and often headaches. This position may prevent your spinal adjustments from holding as well and thus prolonging your care.

2) Most people who lie on their stomachs put their arms over their head which puts pressure on the major nerves and blood vessels going into the arms and hands. This contributes to loss of vital nerve energy and circulation to the extremities which can develop into permanent damage and loss of sensation and/or strength in the arms and hands.

3) The final reason stomach sleeping is stressful to the body is that your abdomen does not provide adequate support for your low back. This causes excessive stress to the lower spine and associated muscles and ligaments, contributing to low back problems and often making them worse.

The final major source of stress while sleeping is an improper or worn out pillow. When lying on your back, it is not your head that needs to be supported as much as your neck. Sleeping with a rolled up towel behind the neck supports the natural curve of the neck. Most of our patients have a reduced curve to their neck and can benefit from such support. A better option than the towel, is a good cervical pillow which will support the curve of the neck and will also help to keep the head neutral when lying on your side. Most cervical pillows will have a life span of 10-12 months and should be replaced to provide the necessary cervical support. Many people sleep on their side with either a too thin or too thick of a pillow which keeps the neck bent to one side. These people often feel fine when they went to bed, but wake up with a stiff or sore neck.

Long term stress to the spine caused by poor sleeping posture or on a bed or pillow that is not right for us can cause or contribute to spinal misalignment or subluxation. These subluxations can cause reduced nerve energy to your extremities, and even your vital organs. They can also cause degeneration to the spinal joints and secondarily to other joints in the body (i.e. hips, knees). Changing your bed can help prevent these spinal subluxations, but only a chiropractor can find and correct them. If you have any questions regarding your spinal health or your bed or pillow, feel free to ask one of the doctors. We will be happy to answer your questions and make any necessary suggestions.