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The Posture of Sleeping

How many times have we heard stern instructions to “sit up straight, don’t slouch”, and “pull your shoulders back” to prevent roundness? By now, most of us are familiar with good posture and the ease proper walking, standing, and sitting affords. However, for hours-long each night, the most commonly assumed position is hardly ever considered – the posture of sleeping. Of all the body’s functions, sleeping is one of the most inadequately researched and misunderstood. And, there’s nothing worse than awakening with a headache and low back pain to start the day.

Before Retiring

To get the best sleep possible: for no less than five hours, avoid caffeine and for no less than three hours avoid eating. One may think that taking a brisk ten minute walk before retiring would awaken the senses, which it does, but it also increases oxygen uptake into the tissue and will provide a deep slumber. Light reading with sufficient light and listening to calming music at low volume has been proven to be more effective before dozing than watching television.

Sleeping on one’s back with cervical and leg pillows are the best posture to assume. The neck needs curve support and the low back needs the legs elevated. Here’s why.

Changing One’s Position for Life-long Benefits

Back sleeping is preferred as it keeps the spine from rotating and allows the ribs and low back bones to best support the organs. One’s sleeping posture is usually determined by age twenty-one. To change from side lying to supine may take up to nine months, so be patient. Gradually rotate your lower shoulder forward until your arm moves freely. The shoulder joint contacting the mattress should not be traumatized from the weight of your trunk. One can determine this by feeling an uncomfortable pressure on the front of the shoulder joint, like a pulling pressure feeling. At this time, the neck requires added support. I suggest two pillows placed under the head to prevent the neck from twisting which contributes to headaches. After this position becomes comfortable, the next step requires the use of the cervical pillow mentioned above. Gradually continue to rotate so that your head eventually lies on the mattress. The worst position to assume is on your stomach. It twists the spine, loosening its ligaments, constricts the wind-pipe, flattens the face, and pressurizes the sinuses. Soft abdomens

force hyper-extension of the low back. Follow these simple instructions and start to feel the many benefits back sleeping provides.

Spinal Decompression for the Low Back

Once in bed, the best posture to sleep in is on one's back with legs elevated at the calves at least nine inches. This places the low back forward curve (lordosis) in contact with the bed flatly for support, and allows its overworked and often abused muscles to relax. Just as importantly, and like a natural massage and spinal decompression, when positioned properly the discs in the back expand by reabsorbing (imbibition) the fluid that was pushed out during the day from gravity. [Paul Revere was said to 'have imbibed in rum' before his midnight rides!] This is why we are taller in the morning. The blood flow to the heart from the legs is enhanced, as well. I supply a wedge-shaped (for the back of the thighs) and flat on top (for the calves) pillows in the office along with cervical pillows to support the curve in the neck. Legs should rest atop the leg-lift device, never crossed.

Night Time Traction for the Neck

One's neck curve, which arcs forward like one's low back curve, conversely, should be supported in a curved position not flatly like the low back curve. This is obtained with a special pillow that pushes forward and supports, like traction, in a natural arch, the cervical curve. This prevents the back of the head from having to have to bear all of its and the neck's weight. The amount of support felt by the neck should be equal to that which is felt by the back of the head, not less pressure which occurs when one sleeps with a regular pillow or on the back without a pillow.

The Whole Body Benefits

All of our body parts and systems benefit from good posture. Sleeping right allows the heart to pump more blood to the extremities when they are straight and horizontal. Our lungs and diaphragm operate with greater efficiency; muscles become more comfortable and ligaments more resilient for free motion and stability. Additionally, you will enjoy a deeper level of sleep, enhanced well-being, and greater stamina.

In Health,

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