

Health Notes

Pillow Talk

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When you wake up, do you feel pain or stiffness in your neck, back, arm, or shoulder? Do you have tension headaches? Do you suffer from arthritis? Have you had a whiplash accident? Have you ever had any prior injuries to your neck or shoulders? There is more! Do your hands "fall asleep" during the night? Do you toss or turn erratically throughout the night to get comfortable? Do you snore loudly on a regular basis? Do you have tight muscles? If this were an infomercial I would now tell you, "you can wake up more refreshed." The truth of the matter is that with the right pillow and its proper placement it just might happen.

Pillows that are good for your neck will provide stable support and adapt to you changing sleep positions. Studies show that supportive pillows improve the quality of sleep for people with chronic neck pain, reduce morning pain intensity, increase pain relief and improve the quality of sleep.

Before we talk pillow design, we must first discuss the importance of sleeping postures. The ideal sleeping postures maintain the normal spinal curve of your neck. There are only two accepted positions for sleep – on your back, or on the side in the fetal position.

When sleeping on you back, the normal "C"-shaped curve of the neck must be maintained. Your head should be level with your upper back. A pillow should support your neck in such a way that it is not so thick that it causes your head and neck to be propped up or angled sharply away from your body.

Side-sleeping in the fetal position is the other correct sleeping position. In the side-sleeping position, your neck and head should remain level with your upper spine. Your pillow must fill the space between the head and shoulder to keep the spine straight. It is important to place the pillow between your neck and shoulder, not under your shoulder. If you are a side-sleeper with broad shoulders, you will need a larger pillow than if you had narrower shoulders.

There are several different designs of pillows that will adequately support your neck while sleeping. The "memory foam" type of pillow has become popular. There are some foam pillows with ridges or contours that many people like. My personal favorite is a water pillow. When chosen carefully any of these pillows can provide comfort. You will never find a universal pillow that will fit everyone. Find a pillow that fits your shape and size. The restful sleep that will follow that selection will be well the search. 

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