

A PHYSIOTHERAPY SPECIAL

THE GOOD SLEEP GUIDE



ESCAPE FROM A
WAKING NIGHTMARE!

Good posture is key to restful sleep, as is choosing the right mattress and pillows. A night of poor sleep may mean the following day leaves you walking around like a zombie, feeling grumpy, unable to concentrate or physically exhausted.



With over half of all adults sleeping seven or more hours a night, the *Chartered Society of Physiotherapy* has produced some useful tips on how to achieve the perfect night's sleep

Sleep posture

There are four main sleeping postures you can adopt – lying on the right or left side, on your front, on your back or in the foetus position (see poster overleaf).

Lying on either side or the foetus position

Lying on your side can take a variety of forms. Some people lie with their knees slightly bent and rest both arms by their side, or stretch them out in front. Others may adopt the foetus position where their knees are bent high, at a right angle to the body.

Care should be taken when lying on the side especially if the mattress is soft or if the sleeper has an hourglass figure. Sinking into the bed may cause an asymmetrical strain to the lower back. In extreme cases, unnecessary pressure to the hip could lead to bursitis – inflammation of the sack of fluid on the side of the hip – particularly if the sleeper is overweight.

Here are some **facts** about the most popular **sleeping** positions and tips on how to make the best of them

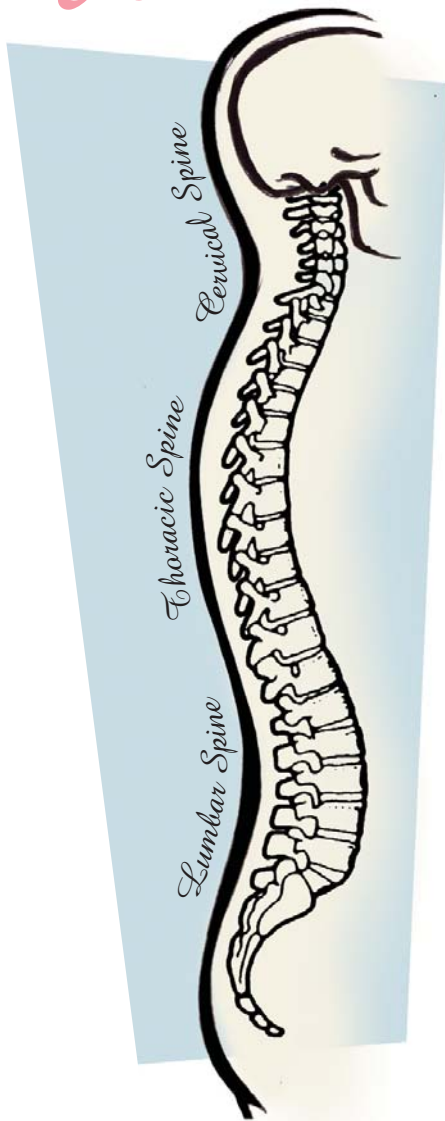
Adopting the front position

Some people lie on their front with arms by their sides or wrapped around the pillow. Others place their hands around the pillow and turn their head to one side. Physios tend to avoid encouraging this posture because the sleeper is more likely to move out of the midline position and sustain an asymmetrical strain to the neck.

Sleeping on the back

Lying on the back can take two main forms – your arms are pinned to your sides or they are up around the pillow. If the legs are kept straight, causing the back to arch, this may lead to unnecessary strain on the structures of the lower back.

Facts:



Exercise

Exercising on a regular basis can help to improve sleep patterns but try to avoid exercising in the late evening as the endorphins released by the brain during exercise can prevent you from falling asleep. Gentle exercise for 20 minutes three times a week can help the body use up excess energy, helping you to sleep more easily at night. Exercise can help stabilise blood-sugar levels. Low blood-sugar levels can decrease energy and affect concentration.

Pillows

The type and number of pillows used will depend on how wide your shoulders are to the neck, the sleeping position and personal preferences. You may prefer to use an orthopaedic pillow, which is a pre-shaped pillow formed to fully support the neck and head. When determining the number of pillows to use, consider that having too many may mean they tilt your neck forward or too few pillows may tilt your head back. Similarly, if lying on your side be sure the gap between your head and shoulders is filled by pillow(s) so that your neck remains correctly aligned. Find a balance that enables you to maintain the midline position (see poster). If you suffer from allergies triggered by dust, find an appropriate alternative.

Look after your back

95 per cent of people suffer from back pain at some point in their lives, and poor posture is often to blame. Looking after your back is vital to a good night's sleep.

Avoid stress

Try to minimise stress as this can stiffen muscles making it more difficult to unwind and relax.

Choosing the right mattress

It is important to find the mattress that suits your needs. Chartered physiotherapists recommend a mixture of support and comfort and suggest opting for a mattress that is on the firm side of medium. Try out a few before buying – lying on each for at least 20 minutes at a time. If you suffer from allergies triggered by dust, find a suitable mattress but be sure it is supportive in keeping you in the midline position. If sleeping with a partner, consider differences in body weight as different levels of support may be required. Purchasing two single mattresses for a double bed may help here.

Duvets

The key things to bear in mind when choosing a duvet is the tog rating:

- 4.5 tog is a light duvet and ideal for summer
- 9-10.5 tog is medium warm and can be used in all seasons
- 12-13.5 tog gives extra warmth and is ideal for the winter.

Check the weave design and covering of both feather and synthetic duvets to see which is suitable for people with asthma or allergies triggered by dust and dust mites.

Temperature

If it is a hot night, wear comfortable bedclothes that will keep you cool. Keep yourself covered using a summer duvet, sheet or blanket. Turn the bedroom radiator off and open a window slightly. Another tip is to keep a bowl of ice on your bedside table with a desk fan running behind it. This will help cold air circulate the room. On a cold night, avoid sleeping in the line of a draught (or minimise the source of the draught), which could lead to stiffness and dysfunction.

Information

The CSP good sleep guide is a general source of information and individual needs and requirements may vary.

Some people may experience difficulty in finding comfortable sleep postures. If you find sleeping painful, cannot find a comfortable position, or would like more specific information on the best ways to improve your sleep, consider consulting a chartered physiotherapist.

The advice in this guide is designed to help make sleeping in your favourite position more comfortable. If any of these suggestions cause you to feel discomfort, please seek professional advice.

How to find a chartered physiotherapist

Speak to your GP about a referral to your local physiotherapy service. Alternatively, visit www.csp.org.uk/physio2u for a list of private practitioners in your area



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