

# For Your Health

## Stop Dreaming About Quality Sleep and Do Something!

An old Chinese proverb states, “Only when one cannot sleep does one know how long the night is.” Anyone who’s ever experienced an occasional bout with insomnia—and that’s most of us—can relate to this all too well.

In fact, surveys have shown that between 40 and 60 percent of the general population has trouble sleeping. Daily stress and worries, pressures from job and family, body aches and pains caused by uncomfortable beds or pillows, and a host of other issues can keep a person from getting enough quality sleep.

Sleep is critical to good health and functioning, so lack of it is a serious matter. “Sleep is one of the most important functions of the brain,” says Frederick R. Carrick, DC, PhD, president of the American Chiropractic Association’s Council on Neurology. Through it, our bodies recharge and renew for the next day’s challenges.

As wellness experts, doctors of chiropractic can provide patients with a different approach to their sleeping problems—without the use of sleeping pills, which leave many people in a mental haze the next morning. To start, here are a few helpful tips they would recommend for the sleepless in Seattle (or any city, for that matter):

- Exercise regularly. Exercising in the morning is best, but if you must exercise in the evening, do so at least two or three hours before bedtime. Any later, and your increased heart rate can interfere with your sleep.



- Limit your intake of caffeinated beverages such as coffee, colas and tea—try to avoid them altogether late in the day and near bedtime. In addition, for each cup of caffeinated beverages you drink each day, drink an equal amount of water.
- If you have trouble sleeping and then get thirsty, drink tap water at room temperature (cold water may disturb the digestive system).
- Eat an early dinner. Eating after 6 p.m. may interfere with sleep as your body works to digest the food you’ve eaten.

## Useful mattress facts...

- A mattress should provide uniform support from head to toe. If there are gaps between your body and your mattress (such as at the waist), you're not getting the full support that you need.
- If you do have back pain, you might want to firm up the support of your mattress by placing a board underneath it. But do this just until the pain goes away; such firmness is not good for "routine" sleeping and it may even damage your mattress.
- Every few months, turn your mattress clockwise, or upside down, so that body indentations are kept to a minimum. It's also good to rotate the mattress frame every so often to reduce wear and tear.
- If you're waking up uncomfortable, it may be time for a new mattress. There is no standard life span for a mattress; it all depends on the kind of usage it gets.
- Be aware that changes in your life can signal the need for a new mattress. For example, if you've lost or gained a lot of weight, if a medical condition has changed the way you sleep, or even if you have changed partners, it could mean that it's time to find a new mattress that will accommodate those changes and help you sleep more soundly.

## Next, pillow talk...

After investing in a quality mattress, don't forget to choose an equally supportive pillow, advises Peter McKay, DC, who is in private practice in San Diego and also works as a consultant for Innovative Choices, the maker of the Therapeutica Pillow—another ACA-endorsed product. "People will spend thousands of dollars on a mattress and then skimp on a pillow that doesn't support their head and neck properly," he observes. A good pillow will keep the cervical (neck) section of the spine aligned with the thoracic and lumbar (chest and lower back) sections. "[The sections] move together and should be supported together."

- When choosing a pillow, be selective. When lying on your side, your head and neck should remain level with your mid and lower spine. When lying on your back, your head and neck should remain level with your upper back and spine. In other words, your pillow should not be so thick that it causes your head and neck to be propped up or angled sharply away from your body.
- Be wary of pillows that are made out of mushy foam materials. The weight of your head can displace this kind of foam, leaving little support. Choose firmer foam and materials that press back and support the head.
- If you find yourself sleeping on your side with one hand propped under your pillow, that's a clue that you're not getting the support you need from that pillow.
- There is no such thing as a universal fit when it comes to pillows. Find one that is consistent with the shape and size of your body.

- Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning. The routine will help your body know when it is time to rest.
- Keep your bedroom at a cool, comfortable temperature and try to make it as dark as possible when you're ready for bed.

Creating a comfortable place to sleep by choosing the correct mattress and pillow is also essential to getting the quality sleep that your body needs to function at its best.

A mattress, for instance, should support the body's weight evenly and allow the spine to stay in its natural alignment. Choosing the right one is a personal matter. "There are a wide variety of comfort preferences. It's very subjective," says Brian Darcy, operations manager for Springwall, the manufacturer of premium-quality Chiropractic® sleep sets that ACA has endorsed for the past 38 years. But regardless of whether you like your mattress firm or soft, give it a good trial run before you buy. Darcy recommends lying down on a mattress for a minimum of three to five minutes to get a good feel. Sitting on it simply won't do.

## Chiropractic Care Can Help...

If you continue to experience pain and discomfort at night or have difficulty falling asleep, visit your doctor of chiropractic. Doctors of chiropractic are trained to treat spinal problems that can interfere with a restful night's sleep. They can also offer nutritional and ergonomic advice that can help improve the quality of your sleep.

