

Pillow Talk & a good night's sleep



Osteopathy &
Sports Injury Clinic

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Pillow Talk

How many times have you woken up in the morning with a stiff neck that locks up, and produces pain, making it is hard to lift your head off the pillow?

Other less severe problems can also occur, which may not be so obviously related to your sleeping posture. For example, pins and needles, or coldness in the arms and hands? Or tension Headaches?

If you have experienced these sensations or you are worried that you may start to suffer, then perhaps you ought to look at the pillow you are using.

All too often people wake up with a neck problem, complain bitterly, and then think nothing of it until the following morning when the same problem happens all over again.

Types of pillows

There are several types of pillow available on the market from different sources, but generally they fall into four categories that are commonly available.

Foam pillow

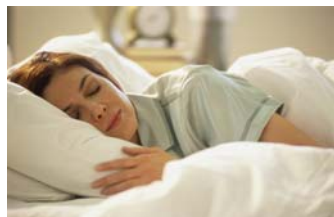
This is fairly dense, firm and resilient, so that when the head makes contact with the pillow there is little 'give'.

This means that tight or tired neck muscles can find it difficult to relax making it hard to get comfortable quickly.

Similarly on waking, the neck can be stiff from being held so firmly in one place during sleep.

Feather pillow

The feather-filled, and the most expensive. These tend to be considerably softer than foam pillows. So when contact is made there is a considerable sinking.



During sleep, the head tends to sink lower, which gradually increases the stretch on the upper side of the neck, and sometimes leads to pain and stiffness on waking.

Hollow fibre or polyester / wool filled

These tend to be the most commonly available pillows, though filling quality and density varies considerably.

They are often sold for allergy sufferers, since the filling is made of hypo-allergenic materials.

A well filled and good quality hollow fibre pillow can provide a continuous amount of support. It allows the head to make contact with the pillow so that there is a certain amount of 'give' to allow the head and neck to become comfortable — at the

same time not letting the head sink too far down away from the body. This avoids putting the neck under undue tension.

The life of a hollow fibre pillow is relatively short, since the fibres gradually become compressed so that the resilience diminishes over a few months.

Washing the pillow, being important for good hygiene, reduces the support it can provide.



Orthopaedic pillow

The term 'Orthopaedic' is used to imply a health benefit, however officially the word makes no Guarantee .

Some 'Orthopaedic' pillows tend to have a central depression which cradles the head, however the head needs to stay in the 'hollow', which may be difficult since most people change position during their normal sleep cycle.

A support bar, which lies under the neck at the lower edge of the pillow, can prove better, since the neck has support across the whole pillow width no matter where the head rests.

Your sleeping position

Apart from the actual type of pillow, the most important consideration is which way you actually sleep in bed.

Almost certainly it is something you do naturally and without thought. You may lie on your back, your front, your side or a mixture of those positions.

However, it appears that most people tend to sleep on their side, some on their front and a few on their back.

If you tend to prefer lying on your front: it may be preferable not to have a pillow at all, since a pillow underneath the chin tends to force the head backwards causing pain and stiffness in the back of the neck and shoulders, and possibly, even a headache.

Many people who prefer sleeping on their front with a pillow, tend to push it out of the way during the middle of the night at some point anyway.

A more comfortable alternative could be to put the pillow underneath the lower chest or stomach. This lets you lie over the pillow whilst leaving the head, neck and shoulders unrestricted.

**To find out more about Body Back-Up
visit our website
or email us at practice@bodybackup.co.uk**

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A good nights sleep

Your sleeping position (continued . . .)

If lying on your back is more for you: one small or medium thickness pillow may be preferable rather than nothing at all.

The amount of pillow support that is required will depend upon how round-shouldered you are and how flexible your upper back and neck are.



Lying on your back: with fairly rounded shoulders means that the neck could be left with too little support behind the head.

Conversely if the neck, shoulders and upper back are all relaxed with of a curvature, a thinner pillow will be better.

It is worth noting that a pillow should always be square across the

shoulders so the neck is supported.

There are certain medical conditions such as heart-burn which produce acid burning from the stomach, if the head and upper body are reclined too far the symptoms can worsen considerably - in this case two or more pillows may be necessary.

The same sort of advice goes for sufferers of chronic indigestion.

If you tend to sleep on your side: the most important thing is to make sure that the pillow fills the gap completely to support the neck.

The shoulder should lie on the surface of the bed, whilst the head rests in the centre of the pillow.

The pillow should then be pulled down so that the gap between the head and the shoulder is filled to provide the best support for the neck.

This arrangement means that the spine and neck muscles remain straight and relaxed with no tension pulling to one side or the other. Research has shown that slightly lower and firmer pillows are generally better than higher or softer pillows.

Fine tuning

Fine tuning of the height of a pillow, can be achieved using a rolled up or folded towel. The towel can be put underneath the pillow to produce exactly the right height, allowing your neck, shoulders and spine to lie in a straight line.

Also think about the softness of the bed. If the mattress is very soft, the shoulder will tend to sink into the bed leaving an uncomfortable stretch between the shoulder and the neck.

If the mattress is extremely hard the shoulder makes less of an impression in the mattress and the neck will be crumpled.

These factors should be accounted for when adjusting the thickness of the pillow.

A change in pillow

Very often, any change of pillow will cause a reaction in the neck for perhaps a couple of nights before you get used to it.

If you have tried changing your pillow already and you find that the pillow you have purchased is not proving comfortable, you may find Body Back-Up helpful in assessing your neck, suggesting treatment or loosening exercises or minor adjustments that will make all the difference.

It maybe that activities during other aspects of your life such as driving posture or your desk or work surface height are a factor in the problems you are experiencing.

Need help choosing?

If you haven't decided what to do yet, perhaps a Check-up, might be a useful first step.

We can discuss your symptoms, examine you and then make recommendations.

As part of this process, we ask you to bring your existing pillow (s) with you to your first consultation to see if the pillow really is the cause of your problem.

Should we feel that your pillows need replacing, we can prescribe our Body Back-Up Hollow fibre or Orthopaedic Pillow.

Body Back-Up is an Osteopathic Consultancy Service, which specialises in back pain and other muscular—skeletal injuries.

We offer busy people of all ages a modern and professional approach to treating back problems

Being in pain has a bad effect on all aspects of life. Addressing it will help you deal with life better.

Not addressing the problems may well produce a spiral of stress that further aggravates the pain!



Orthopaedic pillows . . .
With better support of your sleeping position – ease stiffness and pains.

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