

### **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.

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. Give your mattress a good trial run before you buy it. It's a good idea to lie down on a mattress for a minimum of three to five minutes to get a good feel. Sitting on it simply won't do.

#### **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 and your mattress is too soft, 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.

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.

If you're not in the market for a new mattress, and your current mattress is too firm, you can soften it up by putting a 1- to 2-inch-thick padding on top of it - usually available at mattress and bedding stores.

#### **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.

**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. Information from American Chiropractic Association website [www.amerchiro.org](http://www.amerchiro.org).