

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.



CHARTERED
SOCIETY
OF
PHYSIOTHERAPY

Web www.csp.org.uk Email enquiries@csp.org.uk
14 Bedford Row London WC1R 4ED Tel +44 (0)20 7306 6666

THE CHARTERED SOCIETY OF PHYSIOTHERAPY is the professional, educational and trade union body for the United Kingdom's 56,000 chartered physiotherapists, physiotherapy students and support workers.



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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

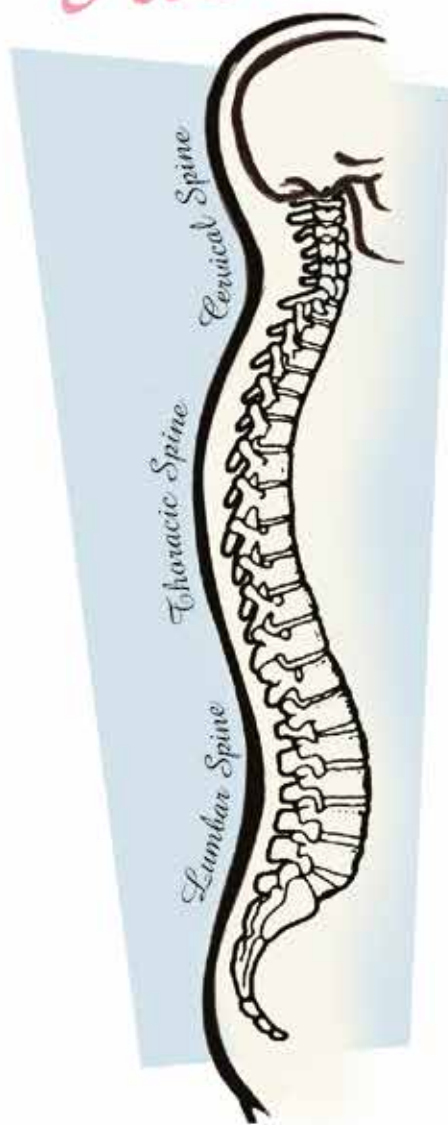
Adopting the front position

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:

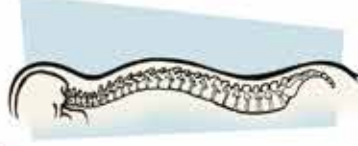
- 4.5 tog is a light duvet and ideal for summer
- 9-10.5 tog is medium warm and can be used in all seasons
- 12-13.5 tog gives extra warmth and is ideal for the winter.

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.

The physiotherapy Good sleep guide



Midline position

Some people will only feel comfortable sleeping in one position, others choose to sleep in a variety of postures. Whichever position is preferred, chartered physiotherapists recommend keeping the body in the midline. This means maintaining the natural curves of the spinal structure to minimise stresses and strains.



Lying on your front

This position has the potential to cause the most problems. To minimise risks, be sure to keep the neck as near to the midline as possible – don't bend the neck too far forward, backward or twisted to one side. If you must sleep in this position:

- Try to sleep with a shoulder slightly back or place a pillow under the chest to ensure the neck is in the correct position.
- If possible, adopt a "quarter turn" by slightly raising one side of your body and placing a pillow under your belly to support you in this position.
- Note carefully that if your bed is too soft, you may put an asymmetrical strain on your spine.



Getting out of bed

People are at their most vulnerable after a night's sleep because the spinal discs are full of fluid. Avoid any strenuous exercises first thing.

- When getting out of bed, roll on to your side, bend your knees, push hands to raise yourself up and lower your legs over the side of the bed. This will help protect your back.



Lying on your side

Chartered physiotherapists understand that each individual will vary. Lying on either side can help the structures of the back – discs, muscles and ligaments – adopt an optimal position.

• To achieve the midline position a pillow placed between bent knees could help support the hips. If you have a very soft bed, or an hourglass figure, pillows can be placed under the waist/side of the body to support your midriff and back. Increase or decrease the number of pillows to ensure that your neck is supported.



Lying on your back

- Place pillows under your knees to off-load the lower back.
- Make sure there are enough pillows to support the neck and head in the midline position, thereby preventing the head and neck from tilting forward or back.

