



Health Matters

the Gordon H. Grannis Chiropractic Clinic, Inc. Patient Newsletter

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Page 1 of 3

The Sleeping Issue

Sleeping Positions

Sleeping on the stomach is only good for your chiropractor, orthodontist, and cosmetic surgeon. It can harm the neck, lower back, tooth alignment, jaw, and increase wrinkling of the face.

Side sleeping is fine, but you may end up turning more frequently since there is more pressure per square inch of body contacting the bed. Use an appropriately thick pillow (see the following article on pillow types), and never sleep with a hand or arm under the pillow. If you are doing that, it usually means that the pillow is too thin. Instead, the bed side arm should be at about a 45 to 60 degree angle from the body, with the upper arm resting on the side, or draped across the abdomen. The knees should be bent 30 to 90 degrees, one on top of the other. Never extend the legs in a scissor-like fashion, or you risk possible injury to the lower back and sacroiliac joints. If you experience hip pain with side sleeping, it can usually be alleviated by placing a pillow between your knees.

Back sleeping is also fine, and most back sleepers turn the least of all. However, while the sleeper may get a great night's sleep, their partner may be tossing and turning due to the increased likelihood of snoring when sleeping on the back. The head should be nestled into a relatively soft and thin pillow, and not turned to the side. Some people may experience lower back pain if they have a degenerative spinal condition. This can usually be alleviated by placing a pillow under the knees.

Pillow problems: Which Type To Buy?

Now you know how to sleep, but now what kind of pillow do you need? As we age and become less flexible, our tolerance for problems with bed surfaces and pillows decreases. Unfortunately, the question of which type of pillow to buy is a complicated one. Take note of the position of your head relative to your shoulders and back when you're sitting or standing with good posture. The proper pillow will (when compressed) make up for the distance between your ear and shoulder (for side sleepers) or the back of your head and your back (for back sleepers), maintaining that original position when you're horizontal. And of course, it should also be comfortable for you.

Relevant Research Articles

IDET Surgery

A recent review of the literature on studies pertaining to the IDET procedure for disc herniation showed mixed results. IDET involves heating of the disc margins to shrink disc herniations and help to fuse back together any cracks or fissures in the disc wall. In the study published in the *European Spine Journal* in 2006 about 1 in 4 of the patients that received the procedure had to go ahead and get conventional back surgery anyway. One study showed that at 6 months post-op, only 40% had a 50% recovery or better. Comparing IDET to a sham, or faked, procedure showed no difference. About 1 in 7 had complications from the \$10,000 procedure.

Sometimes back surgery can be avoided, but if it's absolutely necessary, I recommend choosing a technique other than IDET. (*European Spine Journal 2006*)

Glucosamine and Chondroitin: Fact or Fiction?

Glucosamine and Chondroitin have been touted for years for treatment of joint pain related to arthritis. It is in the family of chemicals called glycosaminoglycans (GAGs for



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Page 2 of 3

On the side, the shoulders hold the head higher off the mattress surface than it is when lying on the back. Therefore, side sleepers need thicker pillows. However, some of us have wide shoulders and narrow heads, or narrow shoulders and wide heads. As a result, the thickness of pillow for side sleepers varies from a few inches to almost 6 in large people. The goal is to have the pillow hold your head so it is exactly parallel to the bed, directly aligned with the rest of the spinal column.

Back sleepers have it the easiest, since there is little difference between the natural head-shoulder relationship and their orientation when lying on the back. Thus, pillow thicknesses from one person to another can vary from about 2 to 4 inches.

The hardest group to accommodate is the combination sleeper, both side and back, because their needs can range from 2 to 6 inches depending on their position.

There are many types of pillow materials. Some have great adaptability such as feather or fiberfill, and others no adaptability such as Memory Foam or foam rubber. Combination sleepers will need the molding capability of the feather or fiberfill pillow to pump the thickness up a bit when on the side, and scoop out a dent for the head while leaving a soft hump for the neck when on the back.

A further complication is the topping of the mattress. Some come firm from the factory with only a 1/2 inch give, while others easily compress on the surface by over 3 inches. The softer the mattress top, the less pillow thickness is needed. So if you have a very soft mattress top and are a side sleeper, subtract 1 to 2 inches from the thickness of your pillow.

What about contour pillows?

Contour pillows can work very well for some people. The problem is that they are typically expensive (\$50 to \$150) and if they don't fit you, can't be changed.

short) a group of molecules found in our cartilage that love water. Each molecule will usually hold about 10 water molecules. The benefit of Glucosamine has been thought to be due to increasing the concentration of these GAGs in our joint cartilage, and hence increasing the amount of water held in the cartilage. As a result of the increased water, the joint cartilage thickness would be preserved, and the cartilage would be more resilient to mechanical forces, less apt to break down and become degenerative. There has been considerable discussion on both the pro and con side of the question of its actual effectiveness.

A double-blind and placebo controlled study published in the New England Journal of Medicine in 2006 compared Glucosamine, Chondroitin, the two together, Celebrex, and a placebo for treatment of knee pain from osteoarthritis. The results showed that in a three-month period, the combined Glucosamine/Chondroitin supplement worked as well as Celebrex (which, along with similar drugs Vioxx and Bextra, was recently pulled from general use due to heart-related complications). At six months the combined Glucosamine/Chondroitin worked better than Celebrex.



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Pillow-Choosing Cheat Sheet:

Sleep Posture	Pillow Material	Pillow Thickness (Place hand on pillow with slight downward pressure to pre-load pillow and then measure thickness)
Side Only	Foam, if suitable thickness found, otherwise feather (not down) or fiberfill	Lean against a wall, keeping the head straight up, and then measure the distance from the ear to the wall.
Back Only	Feather (down OK) or fiberfill	Lean back against a wall with the head in its normal upright posture. Have a friend measure the distance from the wall to the back of the head.
Both Side and Back	Fiberfill or feather (not down)	Follow instructions for Side Only

Perhaps more significant was a three-year study published in the 2001 edition of *Lancet* that looked at whether Glucosamine/Chondroitin had an actual effect on the joint cartilage thickness. X-rays were taken at the start and end of the period, and showed that the control group lost an average of .31mm over that time, while the Glucosamine group lost only .06 mm.

Summary: Taken together, it appears that Glucosamine and Chondroitin does help to at least reduce the rate of joint thinning, and is found to be as effective as relatively strong anti-inflammatories, such as Celebrex. It is also safer, with no side effects. (*New England Journal of Medicine*, 2006; *Lancet*, 2001)

The last word on your pillow search:

- * If you are lucky enough to wake up in the morning with no neck stiffness or soreness, don't change anything.
- * If you do have morning symptoms, chances are the pillow is wrong.
- * If you have ever slept in another bed with a different pillow that felt better than yours, buy one of those.
- * If you need to start from scratch in your pillow search, don't feel you have to spend a lot of money. Regular feather and fiberfill pillows are relatively cheap, and foam rubber works just as well as the expensive memory foam types.

Thanks for reading, and I hope you find this information useful.

Yours in health,

Gordon H. Grannis, D.C.

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