

## **Mattress and Pillow Talk**

*I can't find a comfortable position to sleep in. Can you help me?*

First, consider the sleeping material. Check your mattress for indentations. If it's an old mattress and hasn't been turned often, you will wear the mattress down where your greatest weight is distributed. Some people have mattresses that are too hard and they are forced to turn frequently at night. For others, the mattress is too soft and needs to either be replaced or firmed up.

If you sleep on your side, the position you keep your legs in is critical for your low back muscles to be relaxed while you sleep. To determine the best angle, you will need someone to rub the muscles along the spine while you raise and lower your legs. If your legs are too straight or bent too much, you will feel the muscles tighten and contract. Find the angle where the muscle is relaxed and there is no soreness when the muscle is rubbed.

If you have soreness on the side of your hip going into your lower back in the upper leg side, then you may need to place a small pillow between the knees. For example, if you lie on your right side and get an ache in the left hip, you will usually find that the muscle on the side of your pelvis is sore if you rub it. Placing a small pillow between your legs should reduce the contraction of this muscle and stop the aching.

If you lie on your back, reach under your back and rub the muscles on both sides of your lower spine. If they are tight, place a small pillow under your knees so they are bent and see if this reduces the tightness.

*My neck is stiff in the morning. Could my pillow be causing the problem?*

Pillows are a major cause of neck stiffness in the morning. Think about what a pillow is supposed to do. It should support your head and neck keeping them in normal alignment. We have all seen advertisements for "orthopedic" pillows claiming that this or that pillow was the best. The problem is that WE are not all made the same. If you lie on your side, a pillow needs to fill the gap between your shoulders and your neck to properly support your spine. If you sleep on your back, the pillow needs to support the normal curve in your neck, while not elevating your head so far that the neck muscles contract.

Rub the muscles on the side of your neck. They should be soft and not tender. If they are, we need to find out why and treat that. Now lie down on your bed with your pillow and rub the muscles again. If they are tender, your pillow is either too high or too low. Try other pillows in your house. If you find one that supports your head properly, that is the pillow for you. I find that some people, especially with broad shoulders, may need two pillows when they lie on their side, but only one when they lie on their back.

If you think you have a problem with your pillow, bring it into the office on your next visit. We can easily test and see if it is the cause of your morning stiff neck.