

Sleeping Posture Fact Sheet



Hastings Sports Injury &
Physiotherapy Centre

EXCELLENCE DRIVEN, SUPERIOR RESULTS

Background

Approximately one-third of our lives are spent in bed therefore it is extremely important that we adopt correct sleeping postures to maintain a healthy spine.

Incorrect sleeping postures can lead to waking up with headaches, neck pain or low back pain.

Sleeping guidelines

Sleep on your back or your sides. Never on your front as it forces the neck into excessive rotation for prolonged periods. When sleeping on your side, both knees and hips should be equally bent with a pillow between the knees. This will allow for a neutral spine to be maintained and eliminates lumbar rotation.



Pillow choice

Whether you sleep on your back or side you must maintain a neutral neck position with a supportive pillow and a supportive mattress to maintain correct back alignment.

The pillow height and density will vary between individuals however the aim is to have a pillow that fills the gap between the mattress and head whilst keeping your neck (cervical spine) in neutral alignment.

I am still getting back pain when sleeping on my back!

If you are sleeping on your back and still waking with low back pain this may be caused by tight hip flexors (muscles at the front of your hips). If your hip flexors are tight when you lie on your back, the weight of your legs will pull the top of your pelvis forward causing an arched low back. This is a loss of neutral spine leading to uneven lumbar joint loading and pain.

A quick fix can be to place a pillow sideways under your knees to ease the tension of the hip flexors (as indicated in the top picture). This however is only a temporary fix, a more permanent solution come from lengthening the hip flexors by regular stretching of them.

Hip Flexor Stretch

To stretch you hip flexors knee in a lunge position. Keep your body upright and tuck you bottom under (posterior pelvic tilt) to flatten your lumbar spine. You should feel a pull at the front of your hip of the back leg.

Hold this position for 40-60 seconds. Repeat 3-4 times, three times daily.

