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HEALTH

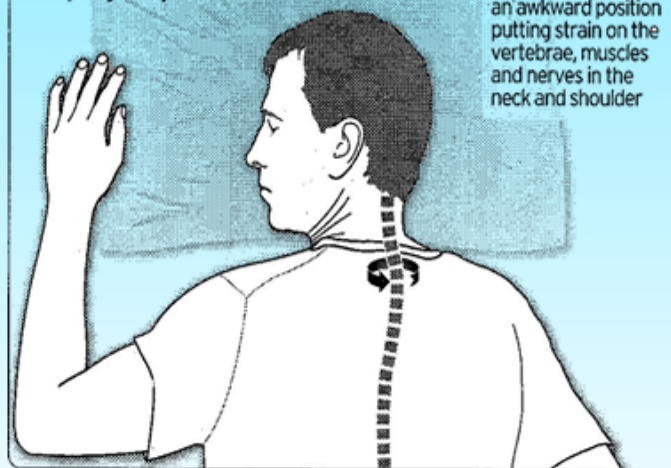
Joint clinic by osteopath Kristian Wood

Week 10: In the home - how to sleep soundly

Getting a decent night's sleep is so important that it would seem to make sense to lie in whichever position is most comfortable. However, sleeping incorrectly can harm the body. If possible, avoid sleeping on your front. For you to breathe in, this position, the head has to turn sideways in one direction for long periods of time, creating an unnatural degree of rotation in the neck. Sleeping with your head on a pillow causes further bonding. The position puts strain on the intervertebral discs and facet joints, as well as the muscles, ligaments and nerves in the neck and shoulder region. This may, through a build-up of pressure, exacerbate existing neck problems or predispose the sleeper to injuries in the future.

Pain can dictate sleeping habits, and in some cases using pillows can help. If you

Sleeping on your front



Neck is rotated into an awkward position putting strain on the vertebrae, muscles and nerves in the neck and shoulder

suffer from lower back pain, sleeping on your side can be made more comfortable by placing a pillow between your legs; if lying on your back, place a pillow under your knees.

If you have shoulder pain, try lying on your good side and resting the affected arm on

a pile of pillows in front of you. Many people wake with a stiff neck due to an unsuitable or badly positioned pillow. When sleeping on your side, the neck must be supported so the head rests in a stable, neutral position. Without this support, the neck bends towards the mattress,

causing the shoulder to roll inwards, compressing the nerves and blood vessels in the region and leading to pain in the neck and arm. Lying with the entire neck on the pillow - rather than perching on the edge - supports the entire area, from the tip of the shoulder to the base of the head. Feathered or orthopaedic pillows fill this gap nicely. The extent to which your mattress "accepts" your body is also important. Most people insist on a firm mattress. However, when you lie on your side on a hard surface, the point of your shoulder and your outer hip are put under pressure, with your weight bearing down on them. A slightly softer surface that allows you to sink into the mattress reduces this pressure the shoulder and hip and supports the body parts in between.

• To contact Kristian, email info@kjlw-osteopathy.co.uk

TIPS FOR A COMFY MATTRESS

• Research has shown that people with an uncomfortable mattress sleep on average one hour less per night. We spend so much of our lives in bed that finding the right mattress is

vital. Here are a few helpful tips:

1) "Memory" mattresses are comfortable but expensive. A cheaper alternative is a decent "pocket-sprung" version,

which also "accepts" your body's curves.

2) Consider both your own weight and your partner's. What may seem soft to a heavier person can feel tough on

a lighter partner's joints. Memory or pocket-sprung mattresses can also prevent rolling during the night.

3) Take the time to try out different mattresses.

Your weight, body shape or musculoskeletal health may have changed since you last bought one. Go to a decent store where a trained member of staff can advise you.