

Your Happy Muscles Sleeping

Your sleep position matters a lot!

All of your muscles like being in a relaxed, neutral position during the important healing hours of sleep. Muscle fibers, and the nerves threading through them, are ideally surrounded by unrestricted blood circulation.

Tight fetal position slows healing

A crunched fetal position when sleeping slows down important nighttime healing. All day we look down and reach forward. If we sleep at night in that same position, those overstretched muscles and nerves can't recover from fatigue. Cells need blood, oxygen and nutrients to heal. The blood delivery system is crushed if we fold up tightly into a fetal position.



"Chin Up" relaxes neck & shoulders

Lifting your "Chin Up" is one important thing you can adjust when sleeping. Here is why:

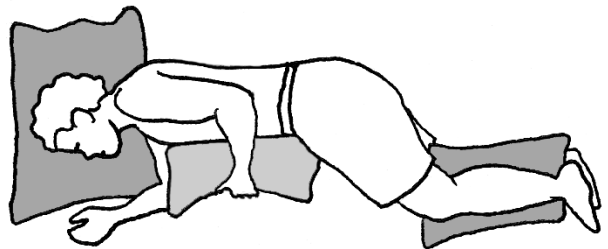
- 16 muscles from the neck and shoulders attach on the back of your head. Note the red and blue spots marked on skeleton.
- Lifting your chin relaxes these muscles, and also serves to straighten the slumped curve in your upper back (left over from your daytime hunched position).
- The "Chin Up" prompt carries with it other open position suggestions—so hips, knees, elbows also relax at the same time.
- If you suffer from tension headaches, this single change can be significant.

Use small pillows as props to sleep with an open body position

Find or buy small pillows, sometimes sold as "travel pillows." Or make them, like I do! Here at my office you can find both pillows and cotton pillowcases for sale. Multiple normal size bed pillows consume too much bed real estate.

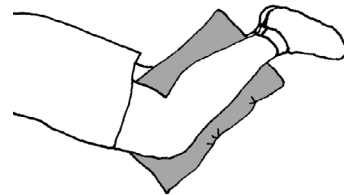
Side sleeping suggestions:

- Lift your chin up
- Hug a pillow
- Elbows stay near waist with an open angle
- Arch your back gently to open your chest
- Spread open your fingers, hands, wrists
- Use a pillow between your legs



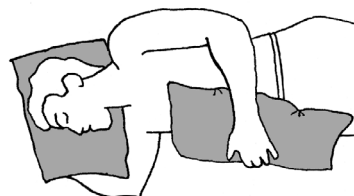
Low Back Pain? Use a leg pillow

A small pillow between your knees relaxes your low back and hips. These open angles allow better blood flow throughout your low back and legs.



Spread open hands and elbows

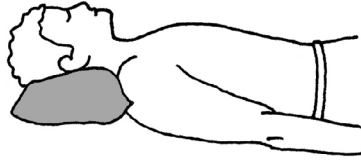
Tightly clenched fingers and bent wrists make joints stiff. Spread your fingers and tuck one hand underneath your head pillow to flatten it open. Lay your other relaxed hand on your stomach, hip or a small pillow.



See next page...

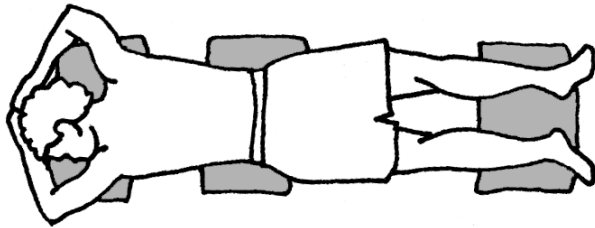
Back sleepers need neck support and bent knees

Place a small pillow under your knees, easing a slight flex into your hips and low back. Also try using a softer head pillow that you can “scrunch” into support under your neck to lift your chin.



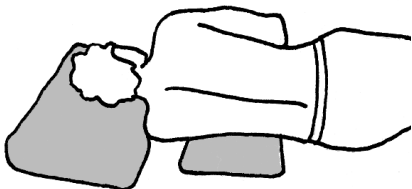
Stomach sleepers should avoid pointed toes

Slip your toes all the way to the end of the bed, so they drop down over the edge of the mattress. A small pillow can go under your ankles instead. Your calves and achilles tendons will thank you for it! Stomach sleepers usually have tight fibers in their calves and achilles tendons. A pillow under your tummy flexes open your hips and relaxes low back joints.



Reduce shoulder pressure by using a rib elevating pillow

I call my own little pillows “Ribbie Pillows” because one way to use them is to slip the pillow under your ribs when side lying. This lifts up your rib cage, creating a “trough” of extra space for your lower shoulder to rest into. This avoids a crushed shoulder, which matters a lot in healing shoulder injuries. Thank you Tilly, for the name!



Change habits with pillow props

“But I won’t stay like this all night!” I can hear you say. That is true. But whenever you move and notice the new little pillow nudging you, just remember to lift your chin up and open your hips. The pillow prop is a reminder about your improved sleep position. Your relaxed body will feel so good, the comfortable open sleep position will start to feel more natural.

Medium size head pillows

Use whatever medium size pillow feels comfortable. Large or firm pillows can push your head forward and down—NOT what you want. “Cervical” pillows vary too much to generalize. The goal is for your neck to lay relaxed, neutral and horizontal to the bed. Broad shouldered people may need larger pillows.

Which bed mattress?

A separate 4" memory foam “topper” on top of a firm mattress is what I use and love. Memory foam (2" or 4" layer) softens pressure around your shoulder and hip bones enough to feel good. An old compressed mattress can cause low back pain. I am not a mattress expert, so explore what is right for you and your budget.

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Go to www.happymuscles.com for more self care tips researched over my 21 year career. Feedback about this self care sheet is always appreciated. Thank you for taking good care of your body! My thanks also go to Dana, my son, for being the model for my illustrations.



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