

**STRAIGHT TALK – Why ‘sleeping on your back’ and ‘keeping your body straight and flowing’, night and day, is the core solution to relieve your pain and improve your overall health and youth – by Justine Vo, D.O., R.Ac., CHR Health Centre - February 2, 2015**

If you are suffering from body pain and other health issues, and have tried all remedies without much success, and if you are baffled by the myriad of advices on how to sleep, and products to help alleviate ailments, I hope that this article will help you to understand the simplicity of the anatomy and physiology of your body, and to use common sense in deciding on how you want to sleep and which mattress and pillow you personally need. Our sleep and daytime posture has started from the early days of our life – how mommy slept us had formed our lifelong habits. The good news is that any habit can be overcome if such effort can bring clear results and rewards – a pain-free, pill-free, stress-free life, excellent health, and a youthful, un wrinkled, and proportional face. My clients were initially surprised that the number one cause and cure of most ailments, besides diet, is their sleeping and daytime posture. However, most were able to change their lifelong habit, correct their posture, and change their health for the better.



**Understand what the body wants and give it what it wants** - The human body is actually quite simple in what it requires to function properly. Besides the healthy and balanced diet of protein, carbohydrates, fat and water to keep its systems strong, flexible, and performing, the body wants to be straight and flowing, without any internal or external blockage of circulation, or any misalignment of bones, muscles or soft tissues, and organs. If any part of the body is blocked, bent, misaligned, twisted or obstructed, ailments will occur (like stagnation of blood and energy flow, swelling, inflammation, stiffness, pain and illnesses), and will gradually affect other body parts and their functions in a chain reaction.

Under the perfect condition, the human body is straight, symmetrical and vertical during the day while standing or sitting, and horizontal during the night while lying on the bed. If all body parts and organs are kept straight, unobstructed, and flowing, the five vital organs that are essential for survival will function smoothly – the brain which is the body's control centre, receiving and sending signals to other organs through the nervous system (central and peripheral) and through secreted hormones for all body functions; the heart which is responsible for pumping blood throughout our body, the kidneys which remove waste and extra fluid from the blood; the liver which removes harmful chemicals, breaks down drugs, filters blood, and secretes bile; the lungs which take in vital oxygen and expel carbon dioxide. Obstructing the physical aspect of these organs will contribute to their reduced or impaired functions.

All other body systems will also function efficiently if the body is kept straight and flowing: the unobstructed digestive system effectively absorbs and breaks down food, removes waste, and produces digestive juices; the unimpeded endocrine system secretes hormones into the blood and tissues and regulates various bodily functions such as metabolism, growth and sexual function; the healthy immune system and lymphatic system help the body to fight infection; the venous system (100,000 miles of veins and vessels) carries blood throughout the body; the strong and supple muscular system (650 muscles) together with the skeletal system (206 bones) and their tendons, ligaments and cartilage help to move substances through organs, produce blood cells, store calcium and maintain healthy joints; the unhampered reproductive system allows the male and female body to reproduce effectively; the healthy urinary system helps to eliminate waste product; and the skin (or integumentary) system helps to protect us from bacteria, viruses and other pathogens, and regulate body temperature and eliminate waste through perspiration.

If you are experiencing pain or dysfunction in any of the above vital organs or body systems, it is likely that your body is not straight and/or their parts are obstructed. While accidents, tight clothing, accessories and devices, and other causes could also result in misalignment, obstruction and dysfunction of body parts, always look at the first cause first – that is your own sleeping and daytime posture, which is within your control. If your body is not straight and flowing, all remedies are simply temporary band-aids. You can spend a lot of time and money in therapies, medications and natural medicine, which may alleviate some symptoms, but cannot put your body back straight. Only you can do this, consciously and mindfully. Note that commonly suggested sleep positions to alleviate certain ailments (such as to sleep on your back with elevated neck and chest to fight acid reflux, or sleep on the stomach or side to fight snoring and sleep apnea) may help a little but will cause and add other ailments to your health. If the body structure is still tilted and out of alignment, your ailments will persist and worsen over time due to continued compensation of body parts to perform daily physical activities (stand, sit, walk, work, workout and others).

**What happen to your physical body if you sleep on the sides, on your stomach, or on your back with the head, neck and other body parts tilted or twisted?** – Physically, if the body is rested in an asymmetrical position during the night (like head tilted to the side, backward or upward, a twisted lower body or torso, one limb raised up or crossed over the body, etc.), the core of the body, i.e., the vertebrae, is no longer straight and leans towards the dysfunctional side. Bones, muscles, soft tissues, vessels, and organs are moved out of their original position, and stay misaligned during the day. Since you still have to be vertical to stand, sit, and walk during the day, the body automatically throws you in the opposite direction (of your sleeping posture) to keep you straight and vertical. You may not notice it since you still feel straight and vertical in the upright position, but others can see that your posture, from head and face to toes, is tilted and out of alignment.

**Understand what the body does when you repetitively put it in a misaligned position** - For example, when you tilt your head/neck to the left side during sleep, various muscles are involved and contracted and the neck bones bent for a long period of time. When you put your neck back to the straight position, all of the muscles on the left side become hard, shortened, and adhered together, and the neck bones are protruded on one side and crunched together on the other. Your body may want to walk during the day with your head and body tilted to the left, in the same position as you put it in during the night. However, gravity causes your daytime body to automatically tilt the head/neck towards the opposite side, in this case, to the right, to keep you upright to function. Now, your head hangs onto the right shoulder, causing additional stress and pain on the right neck and shoulder, because in the upright position, the neck has to support the heavy, tilted head which put a lot of weight on the right side.

**The same scenario happens to various parts of the body which are misaligned** – For example, if you cross the left leg over your body during sleep, your left hip moves forward to the front of the body and downward towards the foot, causing your hips to tilt and creating the impression that you have a long left leg and a shorter right leg. During the day, your body movement will compensate to keep you upright to function. You will find yourself constantly standing on one foot more than the other, and to cross your left leg over your right leg when sitting, to find comfort (i.e., to put you in the same night time position). Imagine that everything you do during the day with a tilted hip and sacrum will be compensated. The more exercises and movements you do on a misaligned body, the more physical ailments you will experience. This includes lower back pain, hip and tail bone pain, sciatica, leg and foot heaviness and numbness. And if the daytime movement is one-sided (like golfing, rowing, or work movement), or involves a lot of standing and walking, the ailments can intensify and become chronic.

**There is a multitude of potential dysfunctions caused by a misaligned body** – It is too numerous to list and explain them all in this article. To help you understand better why sleeping on the back and keeping your body straight and flowing during night and day is the first key solution to many ailments, I cite a few examples of health issues experienced by my patients due to sleeping and daytime posture:

- Numbness of the upper or lower limb (tilted neck and shoulder, curved or twisted spine, asymmetrical position of limbs, and sleeping on the limb itself).
- Neck and shoulder pain (side, stomach or back sleeper with titled head/neck).
- Back pain – upper, middle and lower (side, stomach or back sleeper with titled spine, twisted trunk and lower body, and asymmetrical position of limbs).

- Scoliosis (back sleeper with a diagonally position of spine due to the head turned to one side, or side sleeper with a twisted or torqued spine).
- Hip pain, sciatica, knee pain, ankle pain and foot pain (side, stomach or back sleeper with titled and crossed hip, sacrum and legs).
- Headaches, jaw clenching, TMJ pain, vertigo (neck and head tilted to the sides or backward, misalignment of facial bones, skull and nape).
- Asymmetrical facial bones and resulted dysfunctions (sleep on the side or stomach with face crushed on a pillow causing deviated septum with sinusitis and loss of sense of smell, deviated jaw and cheek bones and TMJ problems, deviated mouth and lips resulting in the disappearance of part of the lip and chin, and appearance of deep wrinkles, deviated eye position and eye wrinkles, loss of taste, etc...).
- Tinnitus and loss of hearing (sleeping with half of the face crushed on the pillow and an arm under the pillow and ear, causing constant blockage and malfunction of the auditory organs, muscles, vessels and nerves).
- Dizziness and vision problems (sleeping on the side or stomach with a twisted neck and face, blocking muscles, nerves and vessels and the cranial-sacral flow from behind the neck into the head).
- Respiratory dysfunctions, such as difficulty breathing, short breath, difficulty swallowing and heartache (sleeping on the side with arms crossed in front of chest, or sleeping on stomach, causing stress on pericardium, heart and lungs muscles).
- Digestive and reproductive dysfunctions (sleeping on the side in a fetus position with leg crossed over, or sleeping on stomach, blocking the flow and function of internal organs).
- Skin dysfunction (blockage of circulation due to side or stomach sleeping, memory foam, obstructed parts of the body and organs due to bent and blocked positions).
- Muscles and bones that are out of their original position and that are often diagnosed as bursitis, a bulging disc, or a 'knot' (everyone sleeps differently and the misalignment of each muscle and bone varies greatly between individuals).
- Lumps, cysts and other abnormal tissue swelling caused by blockage of circulation (side and stomach sleeping)

The good news is that when you start to sleep straight on your back, the body will start to re-adjust and reset its symmetrical tension lines slowly in relation to its core line (the spine that links to the skull and the lower limbs). It will be hard at the beginning to break a habit. It will also be uncomfortable to sleep straight on the back when your body is still out of alignment. However, it is really worth it to start

correcting your sleeping posture which will affect your daytime posture and eventually assist in healing many ailments. Clients who come to me can have their body straightened (or as clients said it “twist my body back in the right position”) in a much shorter time period. I work on various parts of the body in a gentle manner to release all attachment and restriction of muscles and soft tissues, bulging and deviation of bones, scar tissues, hard tissues, organs, head, neck, tight rib cage, chest, abdomen, heart cavity, and limbs. I also teach clients what to do and what not to do to maintain the adjustment and continue to self-correct their posture every day.

### **What is the right back sleeping position?**

- The body (neck, trunk, legs and feet) needs to be perfectly horizontal and parallel to the bed. It looks the same as if you are standing in the vertical position. No parts of the body should be bent or curved. If your head is tilted backward when lying on the bed, you need a medium pillow to bring your head and neck to the parallel position. If your head is slightly tilted backward, you need a soft pillow to be parallel and not to have the head and neck elevated.
- Do not put your shoulders on the pillow. This will cause your trunk to be elevated.
- Put your arms along your body sides, with the palm face down. You may also put one hand on the muscular part of your abdomen and the other hand right below it. Do not put hand on hand as bone on bone during sleep can be heavy like dead weight and cause numbness. Change position of arms as needed to be comfortable.
- Legs are straight, feet pointed up, apart (shoulder-width). Do not let a heavy blanket weight on your feet, which can block the circulation in your feet.
- Do not put a pillow under your back or under your knees. You cannot walk with a curved back and bent knees during the day.
- Do not raise your feet up. This will cause leg and back muscles to contract and get tired.
- Do not sleep on a soft bed or a memory foam top. This causes your back and hip to sink (below the horizontal line) hence resulting in back pain. Also, your skin system cannot breathe easily with memory foam.
- Use down alternative pillows that are breathable and easily mouldable around your neck. Lay your head on the pillow and pull the edges of the pillow towards your ears to hug your head and help it to stay straight, preventing it from turning to the sides.

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