

The Wellness Family

Dr. Walter Keeps You Informed

A Good Night's Sleep

As adults our bodies require a minimum of eight hours of good restorative sleep, and children require substantially more depending upon their age. It is during sleep that our bodies are rejuvenated, muscles and cells are regenerated and we are re-energized to start a new day. If our sleep is uninterrupted and truly restful we can expect to awaken feeling refreshed and restored, however, the opposite is also true.

Sleep Quality

A good night's sleep is one that is going to be uninterrupted and allow the body to go through its natural sleep cycle. Sleep quality can be affected by many factors, which include but are not limited to:

- The length of time it takes to actually fall asleep
- The duration of sleep
- Food or alcohol consumption
- Nightmares, tossing and turning or any other disturbance that results in interrupted sleep

Interrupted sleep, sleep apnea and snoring has been connected to many sleep related issues, such as: waking headaches, hypertension, depression, irritability, fatigue and tension.

Mattresses

A study published in the Journal of Chiropractic Medicine in 2006 showed that sleeping on a new mattress or the right mattress can significantly improve sleep and reduce stiffness and back pain.

Researchers studied a control group of 59 healthy participants who slept on their own bed that was more than 5-years-old for 4 weeks. They then monitored them for the same amount of time on a new bed. After careful consideration of the difference in lower back discomfort, spine stiffness, sleep quality, comfort and efficiency, they found that there were immediate and sustained benefits reported.

This was especially true of those who began the study with existing back pain complaints, reporting an almost 65% improvement with a new mattress.

Mattress Facts

Mattresses are meant to uniformly support your body from head to toe. If there are gaps between a part of your body and the mattress then you're not getting the

full support that you need. For instance, look for a gap between your waist and the mattress. Conversely, a mattress can be too firm and put uncomfortable pressure on the shoulders, hip and back.

In order to avoid creating indentations in the mattress it is advised that you turn it, but don't flip it, once every two to three months, consider turning your mattress every time the seasons turn.

It's also important to be aware that changes in your body or lifestyle may require the purchase of a new mattress. If you've lost or gained a substantial amount



"...Sleeping on a new mattress can significantly improve sleep..."

of weight, a mattress that previously supported your body uniformly may no longer do so.

Finally, a mattress will generally need to be replaced every five to eight years. The clearest signal being when you find that you're waking up with stiffness or pain in your lower back, hips, arms or legs.

Mattress Requirements

When deciding to purchase a new mattress, carefully consider the following recommendations:

- Choose a mattress that is designed to conform to the natural curves of the spine and keep the spine in alignment when lying down
- It should be designed to distribute pressure evenly across the body to help circulation, decrease body movement and enhance sleep quality
- Find a mattress that minimizes the transfer of movement from one sleeping partner to the other

Do not be afraid to take your time when mattress shopping, giving each mattress a good trial run prior to purchasing. Lie down on the mattress for at least 15 minutes to get a good feel of its firmness and be willing to toss and turn. It's also recommended that you take

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your sleep partner with you when shopping and have them toss and turn, too. It's important to know that a bed is going to be comfortable enough for both of you to get a good quality night's sleep.

Pillows are Important

Many people are completely unaware of how important their pillow is to the quality of sleep they are receiving. While a mattress is vital, no mattress alone can keep the spine completely aligned when lying on either your back or your side. The wrong pillow can cause pain in the upper back, neck, shoulders and head. So when purchasing a pillow, consider the following:

- Whether you sleep on your side or your back will determine the required thickness of your pillow. If you sleep on your side it should be as thick as required to cover the distance between your head and where your shoulder touches the mattress. Similarly, if you sleep on your back it should be as thin as the space between your head and where your back touches the mattress
- Choose materials that are the most comfortable for you (foam or feather)
- When it comes to pillows there is no such thing as "one size fits all" so find the pillow that is consistent with the size and shape of your body
- Avoid pillows that are so thick or thin that they angle your head and neck away from your body, as their purpose is to keep your spine aligned
- You have only one head so you need to have only one pillow
- If you find that you're sleeping with one hand or your arm under your pillow you're not getting the support you need

Position is Key

When it comes to quality of sleep there is probably nothing more important than the position in which you

sleep. The best, high quality mattress will be useless if your sleeping position is causing your spine to flex in an unnatural way.

When sleeping it's important for your spine to be kept in a neutral position; this means your body should be level from head to toe. If you tend to sleep on your side this means that your knees are together and your hips are straight up and down; any variation of this means that there is a twist in your spine at waist level felt in the mid to lower back.

If you tend to sleep on your back, it's important to note the thickness of your pillow. If your head is elevated, your spine is bent forward at the neck. The easiest way to judge if this is happening is to determine if your ears are level with your shoulders or above them.

It is important to avoid sleeping on your stomach as this introduces unnatural bending and twisting of the spine in several areas. When sleeping on your stomach the head must be turned completely to the right or left which introduces strain to the spine and neck muscles. Many stomach sleepers have a tendency to bend one leg which is then introducing rotation into the lower back muscles and spine.

In Summary

Your Doctor of Chiropractic is an expert in the alignment and condition of the spine and recognizes the important role that mattress quality, pillow and correct sleep position plays in quality sleep.

Headaches and stiffness or pain in the neck, back and joints when waking in the morning could signal that it's time to replace your mattress and pillow. Speak with your Family Wellness Chiropractor if you or your children have experienced these signs of poor quality sleep.

Dear Patient,

Dr. Walter is dedicated to providing you with the absolute best in family wellness care. So take a moment today to discuss with your Family Wellness Chiropractor any concerns you may have regarding your family's mattresses, pillows or sleeping habits.

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