Is Your Lower Back Pain Keeping You up at Night? Try This…

by ALISON RICHARDS

The Best Sleeping Position for Lower Back Pain

If you suffer from lower back pain you may find that it affects your sleep quality and causes you pain during the daytime. However, your quality of sleep can be improved if you are aware of the best sleeping position for lower back pain.

What Is Lower Back Pain?

The lower back is also known as the lumbar spine, and lower back pain can sometimes be referred to as lumbago. This type of pain can be felt anywhere from the lower spine to the top of the legs and can include the coccyx, sacrum, hips and buttocks.

The lower back, particularly in the pelvic region, is a complex area of bones, muscles, tendons, ligaments, discs and surrounding internal organs. This means you can feel a variety of different pain types depending on the cause and location of the problem.

The Potential Causes of Lower Back Pain

Pain Caused by Injury

Most types of back pain will be caused by an accident or injury to the area such as a fall, bump or strain. You may pull a muscle from exercising or moving something too heavy. Perhaps you have lifted something in the wrong manner where your back takes all the strain, rather than bending your knees and lifting with your legs. Sometimes you just twist your upper body and feel immediate pain afterwards.

Many cases of lower back pain also come from injuries caused by sporting activities such as horse riding, ice skating and cycling.

In all these cases, you are aware of how and when the pain started.

Hormonal Causes

Women are more prone to lower back pain due to their reproductive organs and hormones. Their monthly period may bring intense lower back pain with it. Sufferers of endometriosis report the same. A weakened pelvic floor can also cause lower back pain in the pelvic region. Longer-term conditions such as menopause can leave many women in their 40s, 50s and 60s with lower back pain due to low estrogen levels.

Other Causes

However, pain can also come on suddenly or over a period of time for no apparent reason. The lower back pain

could be due to long periods of sitting, long periods of standing still, or sleeping on a mattress or pillow that is not giving the correct level of support to your back.

Other illnesses can cause pain that is not just specific to the lumbar region, but other parts of the body too. These include age-related arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and hypothyroidism. Dietary deficiencies of vitamin D and magnesium are also known to cause pain in the body.

In very rare cases lower back pain can be caused by a malignant or benign tumor.

Chronic Pain vs Acute Pain

Medical staff may use the terms chronic or acute pain.

Sudden lower back pain is normally referred to as acute pain. It will usually come on quickly and although it can cause a high level of pain, it normally subsides within a few days, weeks or months with the correct mix of treatment and rest.

Longer lasting pain is known as chronic pain, and it may occur when the cause of the condition is not immediately found or requires ongoing treatment. Chronic pain can also have a detrimental effect on a person's mental health too.

Best Sleeping Position for Lower Back Pain, Based on Your Sleep Type

Any type of pain can affect your stress levels and quality of sleep, but it can be particularly difficult to find a comfortable position when sleeping. Depending on exactly where your back pain is, you may find the use of extra pillows can help alleviate your pain.

Sleeping on Your Back

If you sleep on your back, it is important to support the curvature of the spine with pillows. Place one under your neck and head. You can even use a rolled-up towel under your neck if it requires extra support. A small pillow or towel should be placed under your knees to ensure that your body weight is distributed evenly.

Depending where your back pain is, you might find you need to sleep on your back but with your head and upper body elevated. Using a pregnancy/nursing pillow in bed may help you feel more comfortable in this instance. If this sleeping position suits you best and funds allow, a reclining chair or bed may be beneficial.

Sleeping on Your Side or the Fetal Position

Sleeping on your back is considered to be the best for spine health, but not all of us find that position comfortable. If you choose to sleep on your side, again, make sure your neck is well supported, and use a pillow between your knees to keep your hips in the correct alignment. I find that a pillow behind my back gives a feeling of extra support.

Some people naturally tend to lie on their sides in a fetal position. If you do this, try to keep the spine as straight as possible and keep the curvature to your legs.

Sleeping on Your Front

Sleeping on your front is not advised, but you might find sleeping on your back or your side just too painful, particularly if you are suffering from coccydynia and associated muscle and tendon pain. If this is the case and you can only sleep on your front, it is important to use a thin pillow or folded towel under your stomach to raise your pelvic section. To avoid putting additional strain on your neck, you may want to consider not using a pillow and use a tightly rolled-up towel to rest your forehead on instead.

What to Do for Back Pain

In addition to trying out the best sleeping position for lower back pain (specific to your unique situation) and receiving professional treatment from your doctor, osteopath or chiropractor, there are several self-help treatments for lower back pain relief that you can use at home, including:

- Having a warm bath, especially with Epsom salts
- Lying on a half-filled hot water bottle or heat pad
- Lying on an ice pack
- Meditation and deep breathing
- Partaking in exercises such as speed walking or swimming
- Doing core strengthening exercises such as Pilates, yoga and tai-chi/qi gong
- Doing light and gentle stretching exercises
- Using an exercise/birthing ball for sitting or stretching
- Using specialist cushions for back support when sitting
- Using an ergometric chair at work
- Having a relaxing or intensive sports massage
- Taking over-the-counter medication for pain relief
- Using essential oils for pain relief