

# Dr. Colin Gage \* Dr. Duane Drobot

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Nicola Valley Chiropractic  
1949 Quilchena Ave.  
P.O. Box 909  
Merritt, BC  
V1K 1B8

Ph: (250) 378-5456  
Fax:(250) 378-8259  
Email: info@merrittchiro.com  
Website: www.merrittchiro.com

*"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"*

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## While Sleeping, Which Position do you Prefer?

It has been well understood for some time now that certain positions you sleep in may aggravate your back or neck. Although it may be difficult to change the position you sleep in, it may be worth making a conscious effort if it is causing problems.

With all my patients, I try to stress the importance of not sleeping on your stomach. Have you ever sat and watched television when you were not facing it straight on and your neck had to be turned to one side for the duration on the program? Your neck likely became sore or stiff, possibly producing a dull achy headache. Now imagine having your neck turned to one side even farther, for up to eight hours at a time. That can definitely cause a problem! This is what happens when you sleep on your stomach. In order to breathe properly, your head must be turned to the extreme right or left. When this position is held for hours on end, the joints and muscles have the potential to become very sore. I see this in the office each week. It has been termed "torticollis". The patient aggravates one or two of the joints in the neck and they become acutely inflamed. The swelling in the joints can aggravate the closely neighboring nerves. These nerves control the muscles in and around the neck. When the nerves are being irritated, they will tell the muscles to go into spasm. When you wake up in the morning, the muscles in the neck are in full spasm and the joints produce a very sharp pain with even the slightest motion of the head.

People with a generally stiff neck are more prone to have problems. If you do not have good mobility in the neck to begin with, turning it one way and holding it there will definitely lead to problems. Therefore, if you have tried to change the position you sleep in but have had no luck, work on increasing the mobility of the neck so you are at less risk. For those people who ignore the problem and wake up sore, apply ice for fifteen to twenty minutes at a time on the sore joints to decrease the inflammation. You can also apply heat for fifteen to twenty minutes to the muscles to decrease the spasm. The joints will be very tight and sore, and should be gently mobilized by the Chiropractor or Physiotherapist. If the joints are not addressed and remain stiff, they will stay sore longer and the suffering

will be prolonged. If treated properly and quickly, the whole painful ordeal should resolve in less than a week. This does not mean you can just pretend it never happen. You should then start working on increasing the movement of the neck while it does not hurt. This will help prevent the process from happening all over again. Stretching your neck in all directions, except backwards, will loosen all the muscles. Do this in the shower when the moist heat from the water is running over the neck. I have shown these neck stretches in previous articles and I will show them again in the future. The more you do them, the better you will feel, and the less likely you are to have problems. Remember that prevention is the best form of treatment.

Turn your head 45 degrees to the right. Drop your head down on the same side (put your nose in your armpit). Using your right hand, gently pull your head down and hold for 10 seconds. Keep your left shoulder down. Do each side three times. You can also do this while sitting in your car.



As far what position is the best to sleep in, anything but on your stomach is acceptable. On your side with a thicker pillow or on your back with a thinner pillow are both good scenarios. In both of these situations, your head should ideally be in a neutral position. If you have any further questions, contact my office.



Lie down with your knees bent and your feet on the floor. Place your fingers together behind your head and lift your head off the floor. Keep your shoulders on the floor. Feel for the muscles in the back of the neck to tighten. You can also do this stretch while sitting, in your car for example. Don't pull too hard. Hold for 10 seconds and repeat four times.