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

Which Position do you Prefer? (While Sleeping)

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 stiffness and a dull achy headache. Now imagine having your neck turned to one side even farther, for up to eight hours at a time. That could 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 pain sensation and 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 even more prone to have problems. If you do not have good mobility in the joints of 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 neighboring muscles to decrease the spasm. The joints will be very tight and sore, and should be gently treated by a Chiropractor. 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 significantly 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. Some simple neck stretches are available on my website – www.merrittchiro.com. 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.

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, feel free to call me directly.