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Which Sleep Position is Healthiest?

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Your preferred sleep position could be giving you back and neck pain, stomach troubles, or can even be aging you prematurely. CNN has listed both the best positions for your body, and the ones to avoid.

The Best: Back position

Sleeping on your back prevents neck and back pain, reduces acid reflux, minimizes wrinkles, and helps maintain perky breasts. However, it is a bad position in terms of snoring.

Next Best: Side position

Sleeping on your side also prevents neck and back pain and reduces acid reflux, and it also reduces snoring. It's the best position for sleeping during pregnancy, if you sleep on your left side. However, it can be bad for your skin and your breasts.

Not Ideal: Fetal position

It's good for snoring less and sleeping during pregnancy, but it's not so good for neck and back pain, minimizing wrinkles, or maintaining your breasts.

The Worst: Stomach position

It's good for easing snoring, but it's bad for everything else. The pose puts pressure on your joints and muscles, which can irritate nerves and lead to pain, numbness, and tingling.

Sources:

» [CNN April 19, 2011](#)



Dr. Mercola's Comments:

Getting a sound night's sleep is an incredibly important part of optimizing your health and well-being, and one facet of restful sleep is the position in which you sleep. Most people naturally favor one sleep position over another, and it's perfectly natural to listen to your body in this respect.

Whether you prefer sleeping on your back, side, stomach or somewhere in between, as long as that position equates to a good night's sleep for you -- and allows you to wake up feeling refreshed and pain-free -- go ahead with it. If, on the other hand, you're waking up with back and neck pain, or struggling with snoring or acid reflux, adjusting your sleep position may help.

Sleeping on Your Back: The Best Position of All?

It's generally accepted that the best sleep position is on your back. When you sleep on your back your head, neck and spine maintain a neutral position, and acid reflux symptoms are minimized. Because your face is not pushed up against a pillow, back sleeping may also be best for preventing facial wrinkles.

When sleeping on your back no pillow is actually best for your spine, but a fluffy pillow that keeps your head supported while still being relatively thin will also work. If you use a thick pillow you'll lose out on some of the benefit of back sleeping, as this will push your head and neck forward, impacting your breathing.

The biggest downside to back sleeping, though, is that it may lead to snoring in some people. The New York Times reported one study found that [54 percent of snorers were "positional snorers."](#) which means they only snored while sleeping on their backs. So [switching to your side while sleeping](#) is a simple trick to try if snoring is interfering with your, or your partner's, sleep -- although it likely won't work to reduce snoring for everyone.

What about Side and Stomach Sleeping?

Side sleeping allows your spine to stay in a fairly neutral position while helping to reduce snoring issues, if present, in some people. However, if you like to put your hand under your head while in this position it can compress nerves in your shoulder and arm, making your fingers numb.

You may also experience some tightness in your shoulder and neck muscles.

Sleeping on your side in the fetal position may lead to even more aches and pains, due to the fact that your body is tightly curled up for hours at a time. As for stomach sleeping, it's generally regarded as the worst position of all because of the way it distorts the natural curve of your lower spine. Stomach sleeping may also impact your neck and lungs.



Some people, however, do find that sleeping on their side with a pillow between their knees radically improves their low back pain, as it tends to normalize the normal spinal curves.

The Best Sleep Position if You're Pregnant

Sleeping on your back is generally not recommended during pregnancy, particularly during the later months, because the weight of your uterus presses on your spine, intestines and major blood vessels.

Aside from leading to backache, this can reduce circulation to your baby as well as lead to low blood pressure and problems with breathing and digestive upset. Sleeping on your stomach will also become uncomfortable in the later months of pregnancy.

So the best position overall during pregnancy is on your side, and particularly on your left side. This optimizes circulation and blood flow, increasing the amount of nutrients that reach your placenta and baby, while also allowing you to support your back, knees and stomach with pillows.

What Your Sleep Position Says About You

Your preferred sleep position may reveal clues about your personality, according to an [analysis by Professor Chris Idzikowski](#) of the UK's Sleep Assessment and Advisory Service. For instance:



- **The Fetus:** Sleeping in the fetal position means you are tough on the outside but have a sensitive heart. You may also be shy at first when meeting new people.
- **Log:** People who sleep on their side with legs straight and arms straight at their sides are easy-going and social, but may be gullible.
- **The Yearner:** Side sleepers who stretch their arms out in front make slow decisions but stick with them once their mind is made up. They also tend to be open in nature with an air of cynicism.
- **Soldier:** The soldier position is flat on your back with arms down at your sides. Soldier sleepers are typically reserved and quiet but hold themselves to high standards.
- **Freefall:** Freefall is sleeping on your stomach with your head turned to one side and arms cradling your pillow. Freefallers may be nervy and brash but dislike criticism.
- **Starfish:** Sleeping on your back with both arms up over your head (bent at elbows) is the starfish position. Starfish sleepers are helpful and make good listeners, but they prefer not being the center of attention.

Interestingly, the analysis found that virtually everyone chooses one sleeping position to stick to, with only 5 percent sleeping in a different position each night. Overall, the most popular position was the fetus, with 41 percent of survey participants (including twice as many women as men) sleeping in this position.

Simple Tips for Sound, Restorative Sleep

Choosing the best sleep position for you is only one part of proper “[sleep hygiene](#).” Also incredibly important is making your bedroom a sleep sanctuary that is cool in temperature and free from [light-emitting distractions like a TV, computer or iPad](#). Even the dim glow from your clock radio could be interfering with your ability to sleep -- and more importantly, your long-term health and [risk of developing cancer or major depression](#).

If your bedroom is not already pitch dark at night, I highly recommend installing blackout shades or thick drapes. Even the barely noticeable light from a streetlight, a full moon, or your neighbor’s house can interfere with the circadian rhythm changes you need to fall asleep. You want your bedroom as pitch-black as possible.

Alternatively, wear an eye mask to block out light, but this is a poor second-best option. As for temperature in your bedroom, studies show that the optimal room temperature for sleep is [quite cool, as low as 60 to 68 degrees](#).



Keeping your room cooler than 60 degrees F or hotter than 70 degrees F can lead to restless sleep. This is because when you sleep your body's internal temperature drops to its lowest level, generally about four hours after you fall asleep. Scientists believe a cooler bedroom may therefore be most conducive to sleep, since it mimics your body's natural temperature drop.

For an additional boost, try taking a hot bath 90 to 120 minutes before bedtime. This increases your core body temperature, and when you get out of the bath it abruptly drops, signaling your body that you are ready for sleep.

Researchers have linked [poor sleep to a number of health ailments](#), from short-term memory loss and behavioral problems, to weight gain and diabetes, for example. According to a report in the [Journal of the American Medical Association \(JAMA\)](#), lack of sleep can even adversely impact more serious diseases, such as:

- Parkinson disease
- Alzheimer disease
- Multiple sclerosis
- Gastrointestinal tract disorders

- Kidney disease

A disrupted sleep cycle also adversely affects your body's production of melatonin, which is both a hormone and a potent antioxidant against cancer, thus raising your risk of breast cancer. So it's incredibly important that you're getting a sound night's sleep.

Talk to your WellnessOne practitioner about finding ways to get better sleep.



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