



# Sleep Left, Sleep Well

This article, sourced by **N K Agarwal**, explains why sleeping on your left side may be beneficial to your health.

**Y**our sleeping position is especially important to consider for your mental and physical wellbeing. This is because there's more to the quality of sleep you are getting than its duration. In fact, a small body of research suggests that people who sleep on their left side are not only likely to sleep better, but are believed to be healthier than those who sleep on their right side. This idea stems from an ancient holistic approach to health and med-

icine developed in India, known as Ayurveda (science of life). But why sleep on your left side? It turns out that doing so enhances your digestion, alleviates back pain and also reduces heartburn. The health benefits of sleeping on your left side include:

- 1) It supports the body in getting rid of toxins, waste and other unwanted materials. According to Ayurvedic tradition, sleeping on your left side bolsters the lymphatic system, allowing your

body to better filter lymph fluid and waste via the lymph nodes. In this respect, your sleeping position makes a difference, because the left side of the body is the dominant lymphatic side. Furthermore, new research has found that sleeping on the left side can allow the body to clear waste chemicals from the brain more efficiently. In contrast, sleeping on your right side decreases the lymphatic system's efficiency.

- 2) It is good for the heart. Sleeping on your left side improves circulation to the heart. The theory is that gravity can facilitate lymph drainage towards the heart as well as circulation away from the heart.
- 3) It may reduce heartburn. According to a study published in the Journal of Clinical Gastroenterology, lying on the left side can help reduce acid reflux symptoms. On the contrary, lying on the right side may aggravate the symptoms. So, if you are struggling with heart burn, lie down on your left side for 10 minutes to alleviate the symptoms.
- 4) It may improve digestion. The idea that sleeping on your left side may improve digestion simply stems from a matter of gravity. The theory is that lying on the left side allows food waste to move easily from the large intestine into the colon. Therefore, this means that you are more likely to have a bowel movement upon waking. This sleeping position also allows the stomach and pancreas to

hang naturally, as both organs are predominantly located on the left side. It may also better channel the gastric juices and easily promote the secretion of pancreatic enzymes. It therefore enables digestion to work little by little instead of all at once, which is what tends to happen when we sleep on the right side.

- 5) It may alleviate back pain. Sleeping on the left side can relieve pressure on the spine, and is therefore ideal for people who suffer from chronic back pain, allowing them to feel more comfortable and get a good night's sleep.
- 6) It is beneficial for pregnant women. Besides boosting blood circulation, sleeping on the left side can also help relieve pressure on the back, keeping the uterus from squeezing the liver. This sleeping position also increases blood flow to the uterus, kidneys and foetus.

Who does not benefit from this sleeping position? For the most part, there are a number of beneficial

reasons for sleeping on your left side. However some, particularly those with heart disease, sleep apnoea, glaucoma and carpal tunnel syndrome, may not benefit from sleeping on one side.

### **Symmetrical Side Sleeping Position**

Symmetrical side sleeping is preferable to asymmetrical side sleeping. Supporting the natural curvature of your spine, from your head to your hips, helps prevent any aches and pains in the morning.

- Lie on your side with your head on the pillow.
- Ensure your chin and neck are aligned to the centre of your shoulders, and your shoulders are in line with your hips.
- Keep your head looking forward, so your chin does not tilt down to your neck or twist to the side.
- Keep your arms and hands aligned with each other, either by your sides or slightly in front of you.
- Consider placing a small pillow between your knees to relieve pressure on the hips and prevent your knees from collapsing on to each other.

Many side sleepers opt for a foetal position, with their legs bent and curled in toward their chest. This position can relieve pressure in the back. Curling up too tight in this position, however, can make it more difficult to breathe. If you find you cannot get comfortable sleeping on your side, you may want to switch to sleeping on your back instead. The back sleeping position offers many potential benefits, including back pain relief, especially when used in combination with side sleeping.

If you switch from side to back sleeping, a thinner pillow may help support your new sleep position. While side sleepers often sleep best with a higher loft pillow, back sleepers do better with a medium loft — a pillow that is high enough to provide cushioning for the neck, but not too high that it causes their chin to tilt forward into the chest. Additionally, while side sleeping offers a range of benefits, there are two key concerns that may be better served by another sleep position: wrinkles and

shoulder pain. If you are worried about wrinkles, be aware that sleeping on your side with your face pressed into the pillow can compress and stress your skin, leading to wrinkles.

### **Pillow Design**

The best pillow for side sleepers is one that supports proper alignment between your neck and the rest of your spine. Your neck should stay aligned with your upper back to avoid creating any pressure or neck pain upon waking up. If you sleep on your side and are prone to neck pain, you might want to avoid a feather pillow. Measure the space between your neck and the edge of your shoulder. When you go shopping for pillows, that measurement should be close to the pillow's loft, which describes the height of a pillow. You can use additional pillows to make side sleeping more comfortable.

### **Mattress Design**

If your mattress allows you to sleep well and wake up feeling refreshed, then it is a good mattress for you. People's mattress

preferences can range from extremely soft to very firm, but medium firm mattresses have been demonstrated to reduce pain in side sleepers. Mattresses that are too soft can allow heavier parts of your body, like your hips or your shoulders, to sink too deeply into the mattress. During the night, your spine might stretch out of alignment, and you may wake up with aches and pains in the morning.

Mattresses that are too firm, on the other hand, don't provide enough cushioning for these pressure points when you are sleeping on your side. As a result, a gap can form between your waist and the mattress surface. Your abdomen might sink in to fill this space, leading to discomfort and spinal misalignment. Mattresses that are of the medium firm type typically balance contouring and support for side sleepers. They allow enough cushioning for the heavier parts of your body to sink deeper into the mattress, while being firm enough to prevent them from sinking too deeply and causing spinal misalignment.