

Certain sleeping positions can impact the quality of your rest

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(Medical Xpress) -- Sleeping is essential for good health, but there have been debates over the years about whether or not there is a "best" way to snooze.

UC Health sleep expert Virgil Wooten, MD, says it varies from person to person.

"A person's best sleeping position highly depends on the individual, just like the mattress they prefer," he says. "I have patients who come into the sleep clinic and say that they have to sleep on their stomach or on their side, but people change body positions many times during the night, even though a person may stay in one position longer than another.

"There are, however, pros and cons of each position, depending on the sleeper."

Wooten says people with back problems should sleep flat on their back or on their side with a pillow between their knees to relieve pressure on the spine.

"Neck support is important as well to avoid neck and spine pain, so orthopedic pillows are often the best option to hold the contour of the neck," he says.

Wooten says people who experience chronic acid reflux or heartburn might want to sleep on their left side or sleep slightly elevated on their back to avoid the discomfort that accompanies these conditions.

"For pregnant women, sleeping on the side is advocated," he says. "It's thought not to be good to sleep on the back because it could cause back pain for the mother and could reduce blood supply to the fetus."

Overall, Wooten says sleeping on one's stomach is the worst position for back health.

"This puts more strain on the spine and the neck and is not a good sleeping position if someone is prone to back or neck pain," he says. "But really, any position is fine; it just depends on a person's preference. With certain medical conditions-like back pain or acid reflux-changing the body position during sleep can help in getting a better night's rest."

He adds that there are ways to train a person to sleep in a certain way, one of which is positioning pillows around the body, making it harder to toss and turn.

"It's important to sleep well in order to be a productive, healthy person," Wooten says. "If you are having trouble sleeping and staying asleep, it may just mean that you need to change your [sleeping](#) environment-always try to sleep in a dark, quiet, cool room-or it could mean something more serious, like a sleep disorder.

"It's imperative that you address [sleep](#) issues immediately to sustain and improve your quality of life."

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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