

What is the best position for sleeping?

This article is one I have shared with patients for years and discusses how to find a position of comfort for patients with back pain. [<http://www.drcharlesblum.com/Pati.../Sleeping%20Ergonomics.pdf>]

But, is there research that suggests an optimal position for sleeping?

Some think the best position is on your back with your body in a straight line but in one study it was fascinating that “Consistently, poor sleepers spent more time on their backs with their heads straight.”

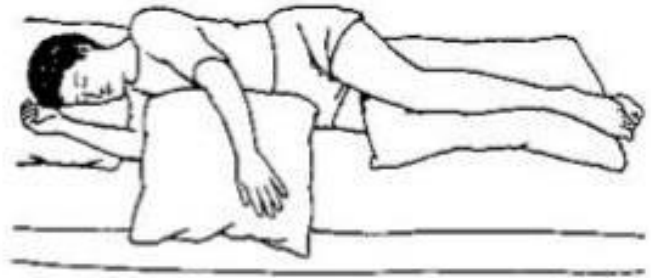
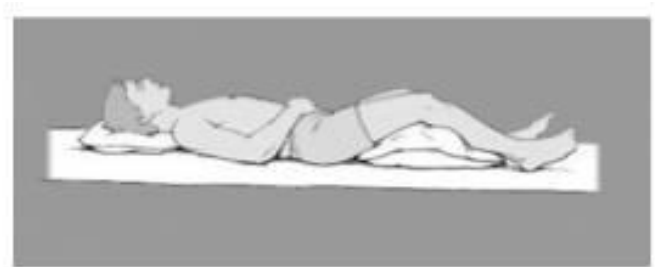
[<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/6844798>]

Another study found that a “change from the supine [back] to the lateral [side] body position increased the stability of the upper airways considerably.”

[<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/11204057>]

Still another study attempted to determine optimal sleeping positions by measuring brain glymphatic (CSF-Interstitial Fluid) exchange efficiency in rats and found that glymphatic transport was most efficient in the side position compared with the back or on the stomach positions,

[<http://www.jneurosci.org/content/35/31/11034.short>]



What do we find epidemiologically or anthropologically regarding sleep position?

In an epidemiological study they found that the majority of subjects sleep in the side lying position and that this sleep position significantly protected against waking neck, shoulder blade, and arm pain and significantly promoted high sleep quality ratings. Surprisingly while sleeping on the back has been recommended for the prevention of neck symptoms this study couldn't find any advantage to sleeping on your back. [http://eprints.jcu.edu.au/2703/1/2703_Gordon_et_al_2007.pdf]

A fascinating anthropological study also found that a most common position for sleeping "humans in the wild" is on the side "without a pillow." Interestingly "Forest dwellers and nomads suffer fewer musculoskeletal lesions than 'civilised' people."

[<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1119282/>]

So from what I have garnered from some search of the literature, side sleeping offers benefits of improved sleep, airway, and glymphatic exchange as well as reduced neck, shoulder and arm pain. Even though sleeping straight on the back with a pillow under the neck may not be the best as previous thought, I still recommend for patients with head, neck or low back pain to sleep in whatever position is the most comfortable.