

Spine West Physicians:

Dr. Cliff Gronseth, M.D.
Dr. John Tobey, M.D.
Dr. Mindy Gehrs, M.D.

Philosophy of Care:

1. To provide excellent patient-centered medical care in a respectful, caring & upbeat environment.
2. To assure great communication & privacy.
3. To treat each patient with dignity & courtesy.
4. To create an environment of learning for the patient.

Pillow Support

By: John Schubbe, DC

It is a very comforting feeling to have just the right pillow to rest an achy, tired body on. In addition to providing comfort, the right pillows can also provide the necessary support for the neck and spine—alleviating or preventing many common forms of back pain and neck pain. Using a pillow while sleeping has two main functions:

- **Support:** From a physical perspective, pillows prop up the head, neck and shoulders - keeping them in alignment, relieving pressure and counterbalancing the points in the body.
- **Comfort:** From a more subjective perspective, pillows create a feeling of comfort, which aids in getting a good night's sleep

Over time, most pillows will begin to lose their firmness and no longer support the neck adequately. When the pillow has reached this stage, it should be replaced.



Choosing the Best Mattress for Lower Back Pain

Sleeping on the wrong mattress can cause or worsen lower back pain. Lack of support from a mattress reinforces poor sleeping posture, strains muscles and does not help keep the spine in alignment, all of which contribute to lower back pain.

A mattress that provides both comfort and back support helps reduce low back pain, allowing the structures in the spine to really rest and rejuvenate during the night.

The following practical guidelines are designed to help patients with low back pain choose the best mattress for both back support and sleep comfort.

Understand and inquire about the physical components of the mattress.

The coils or inner springs of a mattress provide the support. Different mattresses vary in their number and arrangement of coils. Padding on top of the mattress comes in many different thicknesses. Mattress depths typically range anywhere from 7 to 18 inches deep. Choosing the number of coils, type of padding and mattress depth should be determined by individual preferences.

Find a mattress with back support. A good mattress should provide support for the natural curves and alignment of the spine. The

right amount of back support also helps the patient avoid muscle soreness in the morning. While there is not much clinical data about mattresses, one study found that medium-firm mattresses usually provide more back pain relief than firm mattresses.

Achieve a balance between back support and comfort.

Overall comfort while sleeping on the mattress is equally important as sufficient back support. Sleeping on a mattress that is too firm can cause aches and pains on pressure points. A medium-firm mattress may be more comfortable because it allows the shoulder and hips to sink in slightly. Patients who want a firmer mattress for back support can get one with thicker padding for greater comfort.

Know when it's time to get a new mattress.

If an old mattress sags visibly in the middle or is no longer comfortable, it is probably time to purchase a new one. Putting boards under a sagging mattress to keep it from sagging in the middle is only a short-term fix for the sagging; a new mattress is still needed.

Shop for the best value and quality of the mattress rather than for price.

Mattresses with more coils and thicker padding tend to be higher quality and also more expensive; however, a higher price does not guarantee

that the mattress is more comfortable or more supportive. Mattress stores often have sales and promotions, so it is a good idea to comparison-shop for the best price after finding the right mattress.

Be aware of mattress advertising gimmicks.

Claims that a mattress is "orthopedic" or "medically-approved" should be viewed skeptically. There has not been extensive medical research or controlled clinical trials on the topic of mattresses and low back pain. The individual must determine whether or not extra features on a mattress make it more comfortable or supportive.

Give the mattress a test-run before buying.

To sample mattresses, people can try sleeping on different makes and models in hotels or at other people's homes before going to a mattress store. When shopping at the store, shoppers should lay on the mattress for several minutes to decide if it is a good fit. If two people will be sleeping on the mattress, both should test it at the same time to make sure they have enough space and are both comfortable on the same style of mattress.

Written by:
J. Talbot Sellers, DO