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What position is best... for sleeping? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

Is there a "correct" way to sleep? Position wise? And if so, is it possible to change your current sleep habits to conform to the correct way?

Thanks,
Waking up in fetal position

Answer

Dear Waking up in fetal position,

The position you find yourself waking up in is a good one. The fetal position — resting on your side with your head slightly forward, your back slightly curved, and one or both knees brought up toward your chest — removes pressure from the spine and allows the organs to spread themselves out as you rest. This position also allows for easy breathing, so your body gets plenty of oxygen throughout the night. A firm pillow under your head or neck keeps weight off your shoulders, and a flat pillow between your knees can help keep your back in good alignment.

Sleeping positions are personal. As long as you're comfy, there really isn't a *wrong* way to sleep. According to some medical professionals and sleep specialists, though, some positions are better than others. For example, sleeping on your stomach can sometimes put your spine in an uncomfortable position, and can also place pressure on your lungs, making it harder to breathe through the night. Sleeping with your arms above your head, wrapped around a pillow, for example, can pull blood away from the heart, interfering with circulation. For back sleepers, a pillow below the head and a small pillow under the knees can help keep the spine properly aligned.

Almost everyone shifts positions several times while sleeping, so the position you start in most likely won't be the one you wake up in. To make sure that you don't toss and turn too much during the night, use firm pillows (and not too many of 'em... one or two is good), and sleep on a mattress that isn't saggy and worn out (experts recommend you sleep on the firmest mattress with which you're comfortable).

In the context of sleeping correctly, perhaps it's okay to sleep just the way you do now, as long as you've been waking up feeling comfortable and well-rested. Accepting that, or not worrying about having to sleep "right," may help you snooze even better. However, if you find yourself waking up in discomfort or pain, or are unable to get a good night's rest, a talk with your health care provider would make sense.

Sweet dreams,

Alice!

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