

# READY, SET ... SNOOZE

For better spinal health, take note of your sleeping posture

JOANNE YAP  
joanne@mediacorp.com.sg

MOST of us don't worry about the way we sleep at night, but it's time to start paying attention.

Making sure you are in a proper sleeping posture before drifting off to dreamland can make the difference between a blissful night's rest and waking up with stiff, aching joints.

Dr Kan Wai-Ming, principal clinician at Chiropractic First, a spine and nerve clinic, explained: "Sleep is the time to rejuvenate, repair and reset our body's daily functions. So, a good night's sleep is essential to the health of an individual.

"When a person does not have a restful sleep, his physical and mental well-being will be affected."

And in order to ensure a restful night under the covers, it's imperative not to put any undue stress on the spine, a salient point to note, especially for individuals who already suffer from spinal problems.

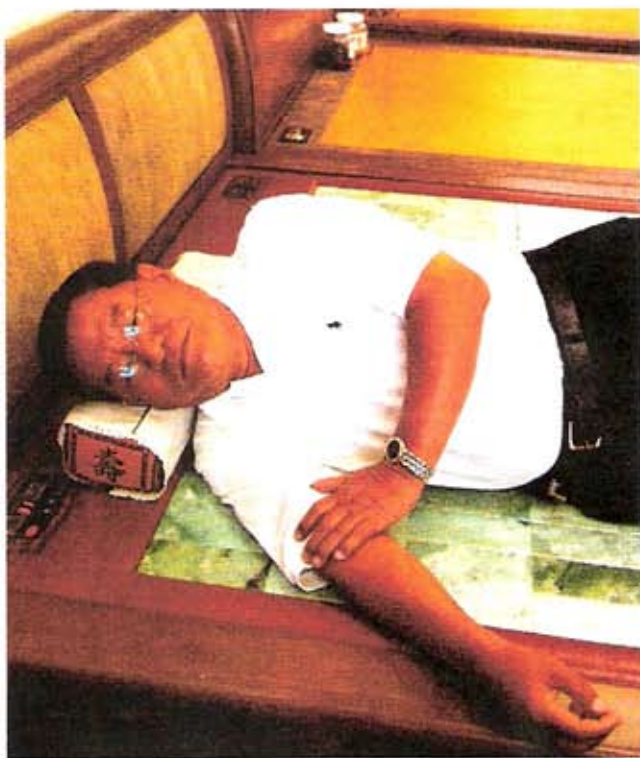
Dr Kan advised that in such cases, a well-contoured pillow and mattress are needed to provide added support to the back.

If these are not in place, lying down could cause pain and discomfort, because the joints of the vertebrae are already inflamed and a bad posture will put additional pressure on them.

If you're wondering if there is an ideal sleeping posture to adopt, the answer is yes.

According to Dr Kan, the best sleep posture is lying down facing the ceiling. Sleeping on one's back is beneficial as the body's weight is spread over a larger surface area. Other positions put varying degrees of pressure on one's spine.

"The spine of side sleepers tends to be twisted (torqued). So they need to make sure that their spine is perpendicular to the bed when lying in this position. Hugging a bolster or using a higher pillow to rest your head



on can achieve this.

"And for those who sleep face down (with their backs to the ceiling), there is a tendency to incur an injury to the neck or shoulders, as their head is in a one-sided twisted position for a prolonged period," Dr Kan explained.

Pregnant women are another group for which extra bed support is important.

This extra support can come in the form of wedges and pillows, to buttress the abdomen and back, while she is lying supine or sideways.

**Sleeping on one's back helps spread the body's weight over a larger surface. Other positions put varying degrees of pressure on the spine.**

Correcting one's sleeping posture is also more than a matter of personal preference — it helps prevent unnecessary aches and pains in the long run.

And if the problem persists and the condition goes unchecked, chronic spinal misalignment could result in spinal curvature, which — if it occurs at an early age — may even lead to scoliosis (the condition where the spine curves sideways or laterally).

Hence, it pays to be a little more vigilant in training your body to get used to the correct sleeping posture, so you can avoid waking up with a creaky back and with more aches and pains in the morning than you had when you went to bed the night before!