

How to Sleep PAIN-FREE with Neck Pain and/or Pinched Nerve

We will discuss multiple options and different scenarios depending on your pain location and sleep preferences.

Painful Arm

If you have neck pain and the pain also travels down your arm, you want to make sure you always support the painful arm. If lying on your back prop the painful arm up on a pillow. If lying on your side avoid lying on the painful arm. Lie on the nonpainful arm and prop the painful arm with two pillows with the top pillow tucked into your armpit.



You actually should also use a pillow prop under the arm when sitting up.



Back Sleeper

For back sleepers we recommend having only one pillow under your head. You should try to maintain good spine alignment and posture while sleeping. If you use two or more pillows you will present with a forward head position. You may also try a rolled towel in your pillow to fill in the gap in the neck. You can vary the size of the towel to meet your needs. If it works you can purchase a McKenzie Sleep Roll for permanent use.



Stomach Sleeper

You should avoid sleeping on your stomach. When you sleep on your stomach, your neck is typically turned all the way to the right or all the way to the left. In other words, the neck joints are at end range which is an uncomfortable position. Such a position can increase neck pain and cause headaches (originating from the neck). If you must sleep on your stomach, attempt to limit the time and switch to another position.



Side Sleeper

For side sleepers we recommend using two pillows to fill in the gap between your ear and the point of your shoulder. This will help align your spine and put the least amount of stress on the neck and upper back. You may also try the rolled towel to fill in the gap in your neck. If helpful you may want to purchase a McKenzie Sleep Roll for permanent use. Prop painful arm as previously mentioned.



Watching TV or reading in bed

Do not prop your head up with pillows to read books or watch TV. Such a position will place your neck in a forward head position. Instead, use a bed wedge to keep your spine aligned and provide good support while reading or watching TV.



Pillowcase Collar

A pillowcase collar provides a small amount of support to your neck while sleeping on your side and back. Take a pillowcase and fold it in half lengthwise. Fold it in half lengthwise once again. Take the folded pillowcase and secure it around your neck and tape or pin it to hold it in place. Try sleeping with it in place to see if it provides a more comfortable sleep. If not - do not use.



Contoured Pillow

Some people find a contoured pillow to be extremely comfortable. Others do not, or they even make their neck pain worse. Choice of a comfortable pillow is a very personal choice. You cannot usually return a pillow you have ordered so it is difficult to choose a pillow. Hopefully, a family member has a pillow you can try.