

Managing Chronic Pain Conditions...

Sleeping with Lower Back Pain



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Pain and Associated Sleeping Problems Need to be Treated Together

Patients suffering from chronic pain often find their problems are compounded by the additional difficulties that come with insomnia and sleeping disorders.

Of those who report experiencing chronic pain (about 15% of the general U.S. population and 50% of the elderly), approximately 65% report having sleep disorders, such as disrupted or non-restorative sleep.



Your Sleeping Position Condition Types | 1 of 3

Lower back pain is not a diagnosis, but rather a symptom of an underlying medical condition. So if you want to alleviate your lower back pain, it's a good idea to adjust your sleeping position based on the specific condition causing your discomfort. Consider these sleeping positions if you have one of the following conditions:

- **Herniated disc:** Adjust your sleeping position based on the position of your herniated disc. If you have a paracentral disc herniation, you will typically feel better lying on your stomach. If you have a foraminal herniated disc, sleeping on your side in a curled-up fetal position may help you find relief.



Your Sleeping Position Condition Types | 2 of 3

- **Isthmic Spondylolisthesis:**
Many people find that sleeping in a reclining position brings the most relief from lower back pain caused by isthmic spondylolisthesis.
- Consider investing in an adjustable bed if you find this position works best for you.



Your Sleeping Position Condition Types | 3 of 3

- **Degenerative disc disease:** You may relieve your lower back pain caused by degenerative disc disease by sleeping on your stomach—as this position can relieve pressure on the disc space.
- You can also reduce the stress on your lower back by placing a slim pillow under your stomach and hips.



EASING BACK PAIN WITH COLD THERAPY

The application of ice and/or a cold gel pack before bed can provide quick pain relief by reducing the inflammation in your lower back and slowing down your nerve impulses. One option to help you sleep better is a nightly ice massage, which may provide additional pain relief through the gentle manipulation of your soft tissue.

- If a nightly ice massage isn't for you, you can also wrap a cold pack in a cloth and apply it to your lower back for 15-20 minutes before bed.



YOUR SLEEP SCHEDULE

If your lower back pain consistently interferes with your sleep, you likely sleep for as long as possible regardless of when you're able to actually fall asleep. For example, if your lower back pain keeps you up until 5 a.m., you may sleep in until 2 p.m. the following afternoon. As tempting as this practice can be, a regular sleep schedule helps to maintain your body's natural sleep-wake cycle — which in turn makes it easier for you to fall asleep each night. See the next page for tips on maintaining a regular sleep schedule.



CONSISTENT SLEEP HABITS

Here are some pointers on how to establish and maintain a regular sleep schedule:

- **Follow a nightly routine:** The first step in establishing a nightly routine is to pick a consistent bedtime — make sure to choose a time that will allow for roughly 8 hours of sleep each night. Next, choose 1 or 2 relaxing activities to practice each night before bed. Everyone's preferences are different, but 30-60 minutes before your bedtime you might try taking a warm bath, listening to relaxing music or knitting. Over time, following a consistent nightly routine will signal to your brain that it's time for sleep.
- **Avoid stimulants:** It's best for chronic lower back pain sufferers to avoid caffeine altogether, but if you're not ready to give up your coffee make sure you finish your last cup before noon. Additionally, avoid rigorous exercise before bed since that can make it hard to sleep due to a raising your heart rate, adrenaline levels and body temperature.

Lastly, make sure you wake up and immediately get out of bed — don't linger — at the same time each morning.