



Pillow Talk

By Craig Osborne, Chiropractor © 2010

If you thought giving advice about beds was difficult – I find pillow advice nearly impossible. But like choosing beds there is...

ONE SIMPLE RULE

The height of your pillow is the only consideration for buying a pillow. If you sleep on your side, it should fill the space between your head and the bed in such a way that your spine is straight when viewed from behind. What materials you use to achieve this height is less important. The broader your shoulders, the thicker the pillow should be. So only 'large' people should use more than one pillow, and only if they sleep on their side. If you sleep on your back most of the time, you should have a



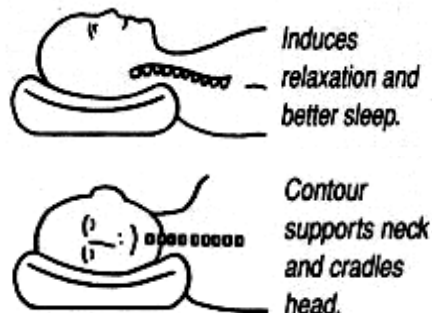
low pillow so that your head is not lifted up excessively and flexing your neck forward. If you sleep on your front we need to talk, since this is neither good for your neck or back, and you should definitely not be using a pillow at all (or at most a low one). To train yourself off front sleeping—try taping a wine cork to your chest at night (use some strapping / bandage tape). When you sleep on your side make sure your knees are stacked on each other, when they split it cause lots of pelvic and spine rotation and can lead to back problems.

If the pillow you use or are looking to buy does not provide this type of postural support then you need to keep looking.

So what are the options? Let's consider the pros and cons or what's typically available.

Shaped Pillows

This pillow type has great benefits over a regular pillow as they conform to neck shape and therefore provide good postural support. There are many different manufacturers with different types of foam (foam rubber, latex, and memory foam). Higher grade materials will last longer and probably provide better support, but you'll pay for the privilege. It's quite important to get one the right height. The



dearer models often come with removable inserts to adjust the height – it's often worth the extra dollars. They can take a while to get used to however, but one benefit is that they tend to stop you front sleeping as they're not very comfortable in this position. I've tried this type of pillow on 3 separate occasions and personally never found them comfortable, I think because they can be quite firm, and I still like the comfort of a normal pillow. But don't let this turn you off, we have them for trial in the clinic as well.

Water filled—Chiroflow

You don't find this type of pillow around much, but I think it's one of the best on the market, which is why it's the one I've recommended for a long time. Effectively it's the waterbed reincarnated, but this time it works. The pillow has a water bladder on its base which you fill to your requirements. The topping is Dacron. The weight of your head displaces the water in a donut shape and this lifts the dacron upper so that

it supports and cradles your neck better. Studies at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine found that they reduce morning pain intensity, increase pain relief and improves quality of sleep. Like most therapeutic pillows they're not cheap but if you struggle finding a good

pillow, I strongly urge you to try the Chiroflow. They come with a 90 day money back satisfaction guarantee. You can trial one in the clinic before your buy.



Dacron / polyester fill

There is nothing wrong with this type, they can be very cheap to relatively expensive—I've never been able to figure out why there's a difference. Don't get confused by the firmness rating. If it's soft, this means low, firm means thick. So if you use this type of pillow, apply this rating dependant on your body size, and the dominant sleeping position you have.

Dacron balls

Not easy to find in shops but the idea is good – think bean bag but with Dacron. It molds to the head shape better, and also can be washed more successfully. They often go by the brand 'Comforel'. Priced like an expensive Dacron plain pillow, they can be about the same price as a molded foam pillow so consider that option too.

Wool

A perennial favourite, the only issue with this is that people who get asthma / hay-fever may have problems with. But otherwise it's a safe bet.

Down

Down and feathers are long used in tandem in pillows and duvets. There is a significant difference in how they work, aside from the big difference in price.

Down has an important quality called 'loft'. This essentially means that it doesn't compress much when a weight is placed on it. So in a pillow it aids in providing support. It can be a nightmare for allergy sufferers however, and cleaning it is difficult, so its cleanliness diminishes over time. The higher the proportion of down, the better your pillow. Since you don't need loft in a duvet, although it's very warm, you can get away with a lesser amount in these furnishings.



Feathers

These should really only be considered a filler in a decorative pillow as they provide no loft at all. To keep the price down feathers are often mixed with down, but the higher the proportion of feathers the less support the pillow will give.

In a duvet, feathers can be great as they insulate without significant weights, and as mentioned are considerably cheaper than down.

Latex

This high grade rubber has excellent support characteristics. It doesn't hold water, and is often found in the molded shape. Although latex is expensive it won't deteriorate as a product. In respect to pillow hygiene however I would still look to replace every 2 years or so.



Some people find latex quite warm to use, so keep this in mind if you're a hot sleeper.

Memory Foam

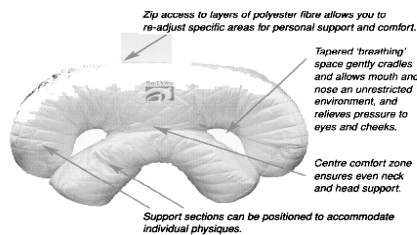
This man made product was designed for NASA to reduce pressure

spots during space missions. And in this role it works very well. Because of how it works it has a tendency to 'give' a lot when it has weight on it, and will give the same amount irrespective of the temperature. As a result it provides a very snug fit but can also be quite hot. It may be worth looking at.



For something really different

Aside from travel pillows—which are worth the money if you tend to fall asleep easily, pillow design doesn't alter much. But here's a new one; it's called the 'Dove' pillow. It's designed to wrap around your face when side sleeping and by doing so encourages you to stay in that position for longer (and apparently minimises simple snoring). The



shape reduces pressure around the side of the face so may be useful for people suffering jaw / teeth / facial problems. It's a new style to me, but the idea seems valid. Ask me for more details if interested.

PILLOW & BED HYGIENE

During the night we lose about two million skin cells and about 1 litre of fluid. The fluid provides a damp environment for dust mites to thrive in our pillows and mattresses. The mites feed on our skin cells and then excrete the remains. This is the environment we sleep in.

Ideally with the above in mind you should consider changing your pillow every 18-24 months. Don't simply turn it into as decorative pillow and leave it on your bed. The materials in most pillows will compress with use and will lose their support they provided when new. The exception is the Chiroflow as you can continue to add water to counteract the loss in the Dacron support.

Air your pillows regularly and leave them in bright sunshine as this will kill some of the mites living in your pillow.

DUST MITE PREVENTION



These ugly little critters make our beds and pillows home. The reality is you probably don't want to know how many are in your bed but you can do something to minimise their existence.

There are several products on the market that are designed to be moisture resistant, and also fine enough that they stop these bugs from getting anywhere in your bed. They come in various thicknesses depending on your needs, and also for mattresses in degrees of protection.

Try www.protectabed.com.au to get an idea what is around.

