

Time to sleep on it

A GOOD night's sleep is an essential part of a healthy lifestyle, but more than 1.2 million Australians suffer from sleep disorders costing the country \$10.4 billion.

During National Chiropractic Care Week (May 19-25), the Chiropractors' Association of Australia is urging all Australians to "get straight to sleep for a healthy life", and is offering specialist advice to help choose comfortable mattresses and pillows to avoid spinal health problems and poor sleep.

"We spend a third of our lives in bed, so it's very important to choose the best mattress to look after our spines," CAA president Dr Dennis Richards says.

"For many Australians, the underlying cause of poor sleep quality and joint pain is right under them — their mattresses."

A study, published in the *Journal of Chiropractic Medicine*, showed that, compared with mattresses five years and older, a new mattress significantly reduces back and shoulder pain and spine stiffness, and improves sleep quality.

"Sleep disorders have been associated with painful musculoskeletal conditions, and patients with poor spinal health have greater difficulty falling asleep," Richards says. "There is a direct link between spinal health, mattress choice and quality of sleep, and limited sleep affects every aspect of life, regardless of age."

Sleep disorders can lead to reduced work and academic performance, increased risk of road accidents, increased use of alcohol and emotional problems.

"A bed that's too firm will elevate the hips and shoulders, causing the spine to sag in the lower-back region, whereas a bed that is too soft will cause the spine to sag at the hips," Richards says. "All of this potentially leads to long-term spinal health problems and negative consequences on everyday life."

"Not only are chiropractors the spinal health-care experts, they are also qualified to provide a range of advice on how to get straight to sleep, including mattress and pillow selection, nutrition and exercise."

SEVEN STEPS TO COMFORT

HERE are some simple tips to help you maintain good posture and reduce the risk of injuring your back.

1. Listen to your back: pain is a warning sign. If what you're doing hurts, stop. Don't try to push through the pain.

2. Get a load off: you're a candidate for back problems if you're overweight. Keep a bottle of water on hand and try going for a walk around the block each time you need a refill. It will help clear your head, provide you with exercise and ensure you stay hydrated.

3. Straighten up: try to maintain good posture by not slumping in your chair while watching TV or sitting hunched up over a desk looking at a computer.

4. Get moving: exercise regularly. To help keep the muscles that support your back strong and flexible, they need to move. The lower back and abdominal muscles are of particular importance.

5. Sleep easy: it's important to get enough sleep. Try sleeping on your side — the "foetal" position — causes the least stress on your back. Choose a firm sleep surface that allows your spine to maintain its natural "S" curve.

6. Lift correctly: when you pick up anything, no matter how heavy, get it close to your body, bend your knees and keep your back as straight as you can and don't twist with it.

7. Stress busting: learn how to



Choose wisely: pillows are also often overlooked by many and have a big impact on neck pain and resulting sleep quality.

relax your mind and body. Consider massage or yoga.

Source: www.badbacks.com.au and www.chiropractors.asn.au or ph: 1800 075 003;

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Look for support

WHEN it comes to mattresses, Dr Dennis Richards and the Chiropractic Association of Australia have the following advice:

FIRMNESS is important. A mattress should be firm, comfortable and supportive, but not too hard as has been recommended by some specialists in the past.

REPLACE your mattress every five to seven years.

LOOK for a mattress with internal spring mechanisms when buying.

IF THERE is a sag in the middle of the mattress, or you feel you are rolling into the centre, it's time to replace it.

LOOK for a mattress that provides support from head to toe. There shouldn't be any gaps between your body and the mattress.

TRY before you buy. Make sure you lie down on a potential mattress for a minimum of five to 10 minutes. Sitting on it is not enough.

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