

From asthma to headaches, how you lie in bed can damage your health

IS THE WAY YOU SLEEP GIVING YOU HEARTBURN?

Get your partner to lie in this position and look at their spine in a straight line. A pillow propped between the knees can help to keep spine in alignment and prevent unwanted twisting of the hips and

POOR SLEEPING
GOOD FOR: Reducing stress
BAD FOR: Causing back and pains

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY: Sleeping in each other's arms can certainly boost the strength of a relationship, and a study conducted by American neurologist and psychologist Dr James Margo found that physical touch, even while sleeping, can reduce feelings of stress in both men and women. However, this position can mean you are forcing your body into a position that can exacerbate existing back and strains in the joints and muscles. It is important to remember that



your body changes over the years,' advises Sammy Margo, 'and what was once a comfortable position may no longer be the case.'

Lying on your side, with your partner sleeping close to your body, either in front or behind you — often referred to as spooning — can cause back and shoulder pain, while sleeping on a partner's arm or chest may lead to your neck being out of alignment with your spine, so triggering neck pain.

ACTION: When sharing a bed with a partner, it is important to be selfish about your sleeping arrangements. Find a good starting position that is comfortable for you, even if this means putting distance between the two of you, says Sammy Margo.

Couples may also differ in their mattress preferences and needs, as people of varying weights and builds require different types, says Dominic Cheetham.

This can be solved by purchasing two different mattresses (firm and soft, for example) which can then be zipped together.

THE SUNBATHER

GOOD FOR: Snoring
BAD FOR: Teeth grinding, pain and numbness in hands

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY: Sleeping on the front will help to prevent snoring, as the delicate muscles of the throat will not sag backwards under gravity, explains Dr Shneerson.

However, if you're a teeth grinder it can make the condition even worse. According to dentist Dr Mani Bhardwaj.

When people sleep on their front, their lower jaw is positioned further forward than normal. This means that if people do grind their teeth, there is extra pressure on the lower teeth, leading to significant wear.

And this position can also lead to nerve problems in the upper body.

'When lying on the front, too many or too few pillows will affect the neck position and put it out of alignment with the spine. This will increase the



likelihood of nerve compression, especially in older people,' says Dr Eccleston.

Also, you have to rotate your neck to either the left or right, causing strain on one side.

Nerve compression occurs when the bones of the spine press on the nerves in the neck.

The risk of the condition increases as the vertebrae become arthritic with age, as this narrows the channel the nerves have to pass through.

People suffering from this condition often complain of numbness and tingling in the fingers.

ACTION: Dr Eccleston recommends a latex foam or pocket-sprung mattress, as these will mould to the shape of your body and provide better support and protection for your spine than a normal, sprung mattress will.

Sammy Margo says: 'You could also try sleeping on a pillow placed lengthwise under your stomach to your shoulders, as this can help to reduce the arching of the back.'

■ The snore stoppers — Page 38

Picture: GETTY

Migraines: A shock up your nose could help

SCIENTISTS are implanting remote-controlled devices into the noses of patients to treat severe headaches.

The gadget, which issues small electric shocks, is being surgically inserted above nerves at the top of the nose in patients who suffer from migraines.

The idea is that when they feel a headache starting, patients press a button on the remote that causes the device to deliver a mild shock, which numbs the nerves and halts the pain of the headache.

It is thought that 15 per cent of Irish people suffer from migraine. It is also estimated that the condition costs Irish businesses €250million every year, as the average sufferer misses between 1.5 and 4.5 days from work annually.

The average frequency of attacks is one a month, but some people have more than 40 attacks a year.

Though the cause is not known, levels of the brain chemical serotonin — the 'feel-good' chemical — drop during a migraine. One theory is that the low levels cause blood vessels in the brain to suddenly narrow, causing distorted vision, light sensitivity and headaches.

The dilation or widening of the



blood vessels minutes later is thought to cause the pain. Pain-killing drugs are not effective for all sufferers and they can have side-effects.

In a U.S. trial at the Cleveland Clinic, doctors will target the collection of nerves — called the sphenopalatine ganglion — at the top of the nose involved in transmitting the pain signals.

Doctors believe that the shocks act to over-stimulate the nerve, numbing it and preventing it carrying any further pain signals to the brain.

In the trial, doctors will surgically implant the device that delivers small electric shocks to the nerves, along with a generator which is surgically implanted in the upper chest. The two are connected by wires tunneled under the skin.

Whenever a patient feels a headache coming on, they press the wireless remote, which prompts the device to issue a tiny electrical current. This current stimulates the nerve and stops the headache.

People on the trial will keep a headache diary throughout the study. If successful, this study is likely to be followed by a larger clinical trial.

ROGER DOBSON