



## Information for Patients

# LATERAL SLEEP

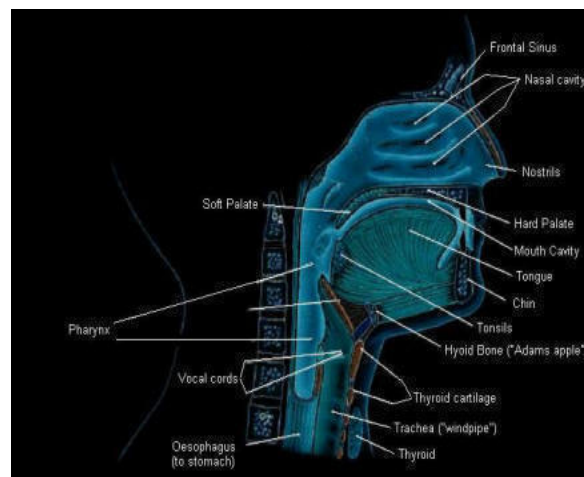


### Background information

Snoring and Obstructive Sleep Apnoea (OSA) are usually worse when sufferers sleep on their back (compared with sleeping on their side). For this reason individuals who suffer from mild or moderate snoring and/or OSA can sometimes control their OSA by learning to sleep exclusively on their side (this is called a lateral sleep position).

### How lateral sleep reduces snoring and sleep apnoea:

The airway at the back of the throat (called the pharynx) is a soft, collapsible tube. During wakefulness, muscles keep the airway open to allow us to breathe. These muscles relax during sleep and the airway narrows. Snoring occurs when structures in the relaxed airway vibrate as air we breathe passes in and out. Obstructive Sleep Apnoea (OSA) occurs when the relaxed airway becomes so narrow that breathing becomes partially or completely blocked.



The effect that muscle relaxation has on the size of the airway depends on gravity: the tongue will tend to fall backwards and block the airway more readily when sufferers sleep on their back rather than on their side. This is why many people can reduce their snoring and OSA significantly by sleeping only in a lateral position.

### How you can promote lateral sleep:

Many methods can be used to promote lateral sleep. Every individual needs to trial different approaches in order to find the one that works best for them. Most methods involve placing something behind the back that makes it uncomfortable, difficult or impossible to lie on the back.

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### *How to maintain exclusively lateral sleep*

Sleeping with a pillow or two behind the back and if necessary, another between the legs. These act to reduce the chance of rolling onto the back at night.

Sewing tennis balls or ping-pong balls into the back of a garment such as a T-Shirt worn at night: this will cause discomfort if the wearer rolls unintentionally onto their back (helping them to stay on their side). Children's toys, especially 'squeaky' toys which make noise when squeezed, larger items such as plastic boxes or rolled-up towels can also be effective.

Some people can maintain lateral sleep simply by making a conscious decision to do so, without any other intervention, although learning a new sleep position often takes 4 to 6 weeks. However, many people roll onto their back unknowingly during the night and therefore may need other measures as well.

Various commercial devices are also available, based on similar principles.

Remember that what matters most is keeping the head on the side (the position of the body is less important and many patients find it best for their *body* to be oblique and only their *head* to be strictly lateral).

Whatever method is chosen, it is important that it is used every night and all night. Lateral sleep is a treatment like any other: it will fail if not used correctly and consistently, and it requires commitment.

### *If you are unable to maintain lateral sleep....*

For those who are unable to maintain lateral sleep, there are a variety of other treatment-options available. Discuss the issue with your treating doctor.

