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Pillow support and comfort

It is a very comforting feeling to have just the right pillow to rest an achy, tired body. In addition to providing comfort, the right pillow can also provide the necessary support for the neck and spine - alleviating or preventing many common forms of back pain and neck pain.

Use of a pillow while sleeping has two main functions:

- **Support:** From a physical perspective, pillows prop up the head, neck and shoulders - keeping them in alignment, relieving pressure and counterbalancing the points in the body.
- **Comfort:** From a more subjective perspective, pillows create a feeling of comfort, which aids in getting a good night's sleep and feeling well rested.

Your pillow

The traditional pillow is the mattress top pillow - used to provide support for the head, neck, and upper spine while the body is lying in bed in a resting position. For optimum support, it is best to select a pillow that has the following characteristics:

1. **Designed to keep the spine in natural alignment** - the neck curves slightly and it's important to maintain this curve when in a resting position. If the height of the pillow is too high or too low when sleeping on ones side or back the neck is bent abnormally leading to muscle strain of the upper back, neck and shoulders. This altered position may also cause altered or obstructed breathing leading to sleep apnoea and/or snoring.
Based on the body's measurements and personal preference, the pillow should maintain a height of 8 to 15cm.
2. **Feels comfortable** - a large part of what makes a good pillow is personal preference. If the pillow feels comfortable, it's likely to help one relax, get a good night's sleep, and feel well rested in the morning.
3. **Adjustable** - to help the pillow conform to the various sizes of individuals in addition to the various ways in which we all sleep, it is best if the pillow can be adjusted to fit the unique shape and curves and sleeping position of the user. A pillow should mold to one's individual shape and not lead to any undue pressure.
4. **Pillows for each sleep position** - one's sleep position will dictate how a traditional mattress top pillow can be used to provide the appropriate support.
 - a. **Back** - when lying on the back, a pillow should support the natural curvature of the cervical spine, with adequate support under the head, neck, and shoulders. When sleeping on the back, the height of the pillow should be lower than in the sideways position. Placing a pillow or two beneath the knees further alleviates any back strain.
 - b. **Side** - when lying on one's side, a pillow should support the head and neck such that the spine maintains a straight and natural horizontal line. Weight should be evenly distributed so as not to create unnatural bending or pressure.
 - c. **Stomach** - if sleeping or resting on the stomach is preferred, the pillow should be relatively flat, or the head should rest directly on the mattress, so that the head and neck aren't turned unnaturally to either side. In this position, you may find that placing another relatively flat pillow under the abdomen will assist in maintaining the natural alignment of the spine.

Over time, most pillows will begin to lose their firmness and no longer support the neck adequately. When the pillow has reached this stage, it should be replaced. **We have a range of excellent supportive pillows at head to toe healthcare so please ask your health care practitioner if one of these may be suitable for you.**