

**- Sleep**

## How to choose the perfect pillow

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Choosing the perfect pillow involves a lot of personal preference and there are so many options, so how do you decide?



Dr Michael J. Breus, known in the United States as “The Sleep Doctor”, says the fill and firmness of the pillow are key considerations, along with a person’s primary sleeping position and type of mattress.

Getting it right is almost as important as the mattress itself, he says. That’s because the pillow is vital in supporting a healthy sleeping posture by helping keep the body aligned from the knees and hips, through the spine to the chest, shoulders, neck and head.

If the neck and shoulders don’t get enough support or are propped up too high, resulting strain can lead to discomfort and poor-quality sleep.

Breus says most pillows need to be replaced after about 18 months, although memory foam pillows are often good for about three years.

“If you’re using a pillow that’s five or six years old, you’re not getting the support you need,” he says.

The fill is one of the main considerations.

Breus says down is good if you like a soft place to rest your head, and opting for a higher quality down pillow can help alleviate allergy fears because the down will likely be cleaner.

Polyester fill and synthetic down are less expensive but will flatten and require replacing sooner than other types of fill.

Wool is naturally hypoallergenic and resistant to mould and dust mites. It also wicks moisture from your head and neck, which helps regulate your temperature. Wool pillows tend to be quite firm and have good longevity, Breus says.

Latex pillows are also resistant to mould and dust mites. They hold their form so aren’t good if you like to squish your pillow into shape, but it means they can be contoured by manufacturers to give extra support to the head and neck, or to help control movement.

Memory foam conforms to your individual shape and distributes weight evenly across its surface. This makes it a popular choice for people with head and neck pain. However, memory foam retains

heat, which can lead to discomfort and sweating. To counter this, look for a higher-quality model with inbuilt ventilation, he says.

The fill weight is personal preference. If you like to scrunch and reshape your pillow, go for lighter. However, Breus says you should spend to the top of your budget because any pillow will get a lot of use; about 2500 to 3000 hours a year.

Sleeping position matters but there are no hard and fast rules, because almost everyone switches position throughout the night.

“You want a pillow that works for you in all your sleeping positions,” Breus says.

For mostly side sleepers, he recommends a firmer pillow about as thick as the distance between your ear and outside shoulder.

Stomach sleepers may need a soft pillow. Placing an extra pillow under your stomach or pelvis may help prevent back pain, Breus says.

Back sleepers probably need a flatter pillow to keep their head and neck in alignment.

If you have a firm mattress, Breus recommends a softer pillow to compensate; and for a softer mattress, a firmer pillow.