



Sleep

Consistently having a restful night's sleep of at least seven hours is the first necessary step in solving chronic pain. Although you can make improvements by using other tools, real healing won't happen without adequate sleep.

Even though patients came to me for surgery, sleep was the first variable that helped my patients begin to feel better. I took an aggressive approach and by presenting basic sleep hygiene concepts, helped them calm down their nervous system. Often, by adjusting medications, most of my patients began to experience a consistent, restful night's sleep within four to six weeks. If we couldn't make that happen, I would quickly refer them to a sleep specialist.



Sleep and pain

I had originally thought that people in chronic pain could not sleep because of their pain. But a large study out of Israel showed that it is a lack of sleep that induces chronic pain. It also demonstrated that the reverse was **not** true – that pain caused insomnia. (1)

Another study documented that lack of sleep was a bigger predictor of becoming disabled than the severity of back pain. Even more interesting to me was that this was also true for leg pain (sciatica), which surgeons

generally feel is the most disabling problem. Turns out insomnia is one the greatest hurdles for patients to overcome. (2)

Sleep is number one. You must calm down your nervous system in order to be able to have a good night's rest. If your body is full of adrenaline, there is no possible way for you to be relaxed enough to fall asleep and stay asleep.

The DOC principles will only be marginally effective if you are not regularly getting 7 or 8 hours of restful sleep. If you have been in pain for a while, medications are usually required to begin the process. There are combinations that will allow you to sleep, regardless of the level of your pain.

Not sleeping is NOT an option. No major decisions regarding your spine care should be made until you feel rested during the day. This is particularly true in regard to spine surgery.

Getting to sleep

This is the sleep chapter of *Back in Control: A Surgeon's Roadmap Out of Chronic*. It outlines eight categories of interventions, most of which can be implemented on your own. Please use this a reference to collect your own set of resources to experience a consistently restful night's sleep. You should be able to attain this goal within 4 – 6 weeks. If you cannot, then you should consult a sleep specialist quickly. Waiting to sleep until the pain abates doesn't work. It is the other way around.

1. Agmon M and Galit Armon. "Increased insomnia symptoms predict the onset of back pain among employed adults." PLOS One (2014); 9: 1-7.
2. Zarrabian MM, et al. "Relationship between sleep, pain, and disability in patients with spinal pathology." Archives of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (2014); 95:1504-1509.