

may help the condition to settle. When you sit or bend, the painful area must still bear its normal load of body weight.

Pain can often make muscles seize up in a protective spasm (if you can't move, you can't be hurt). You can reduce the spasm by lying down. Lying on your front, face down, may be as good if not better as lying on your side. However, its effects vary from person to person. If a disc is protruding towards the back of the spine, this position may be too painful initially. The same is true if you have an inflamed or sprained facet joint. In both cases, try the Fowler position (*see below*). This position gently stretches the lower back, opening the facet joints slightly and

accommodating the protruding disc rather than pinching it. Consequently, the protective muscle tension is encouraged to relax. Gradually lower your legs by using fewer pillows, once the acute spasm has passed.

### Sitting

A sitting position may be the most comfortable but it can slow recovery because the pressure on the discs will be 150 per cent (*see p. 143*). When sitting up, keep your back straight if your pain is caused by a protruding disc. You may slouch as you sit so that the disc is no longer pressing on a nerve, but the weight of your spine will still press down on the disc, slowing its natural resolution.

### Neck pain

Acute neck pain may hurt when you hold your head up, so spend the first day or two lying flat to avoid added stress. When sleeping, tuck a twisted pillow or a rolled and twisted towel around your neck as if it were a thick scarf (*see below*).

### To rest or not to rest

There is no virtue in prolonging bed rest beyond two or three days. Evidence shows that getting moving as early as your pain allows leads to a better outcome, both in the short and long term.

If you need a few days' rest, do not get up and help around the house. This will undo all the beneficial effects of rest. Enjoy being looked after

if you have the help. To relieve any boredom you may feel, listen to music, read books, watch television or call friends and family. Eat your meals lying on your side or propped up on one elbow. Do not be tempted to sit up. Avoid straining on the toilet. Get up as soon as you can and do not be afraid to get moving again.

## Relaxation and pain relief

Severe pain causes your muscles to go into spasm, which in turn increases your pain. Relief from pain not only makes you more comfortable, it enables you to get moving again. Try remedies such as heat or ice, massage, medicines, vibrators or rubs.

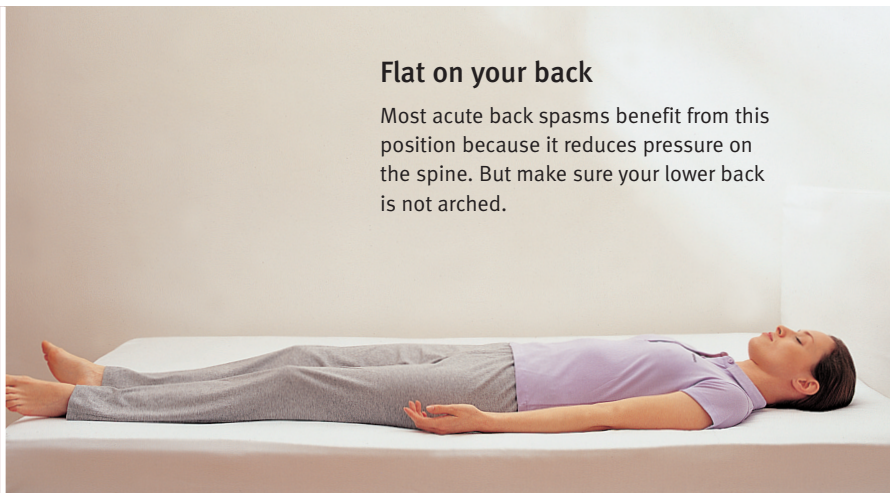
### Resting your spine

Try these positions to find the best one for you. If you prefer lying on your side, one side may be more comfortable than the other.

Lie on a firm bed base and a firm, but not too hard, mattress, (*see p. 147*). When lying on your back, do not use a pillow unless you are uncomfortable without one; even then you should use only one pillow, otherwise your spine may flex too much. Special pillows for helping neck pain are available (*see p. 147*). An adjustable bed allows you to elevate the lower section and adopt the Fowler position.

#### Flat on your back

Most acute back spasms benefit from this position because it reduces pressure on the spine. But make sure your lower back is not arched.



#### The Fowler position

If you find lying flat on your back uncomfortable, lie with your knees bent at right angles and your legs supported with pillows; this reduces the curve in your lower back and minimizes disc pressure.



#### Supporting your neck

Roll up a small towel into a sausage shape, then place it round your neck. This acts as a soft collar and prevents your head lolling to either side at night.



#### Lying on your side

Place a small pillow between your knees to prevent your hips from rotating and twisting your spine.

