

Get Your Beauty Sleep-On Your Back

Have you ever awakened in the morning and dragged yourself to the bathroom only to glance in the mirror and realize that you look like your passport photo?

If this happens more often than you'd like, the simple cause may be lack of sleep. Research has shown that most adults function best with eight to nine hours of sleep a night.ⁱ Whether because of your habits of burning the candle at both ends or biological disruptions of normal sleep patterns, this sleep deficit quickly takes a toll on you emotionally and physically, and your face is no exception.

We're all too familiar with the look. Dark circles show up under your eyes, and your complexion looks dull and gray. When your body is tired, skin pales, so the bluish blood vessels near the surface become more pronounced. Additionally, blood may seep from the tiny capillaries around the eyes, resulting in permanent dark shadows. Lack of sleep also raises cortisol and glucose levels, causing health problems such as hypertension and Type II diabetes, which in turn speed up the aging process.

Skin “rests” at night. When you sleep, the cells undergo repair and turn over slightly faster, helping your face look bright and refreshed. Therefore, if you don't get enough sleep, you won't look your best.

Just as important as getting a good night's sleep is the position in which you sleep. In 1987, Dr. Samuel J. Stegman first described “sleep creases”- the facial lines often mistaken for wrinkles that appear when you

get up in the morning and deepen and persist over time.

ii If you sleep facedown on a pillow or primarily on one side, the weight of your body and gravity will cause the creases.

We call these diagonal lines across the forehead, from the lower eyelid to the bottom of the nose and through the lip and chin, “sleep crush”.

In addition to the formation of these specific lines, your sleep position can also deepen the natural lines of facial expression.

This is especially apparent in the nasolabial folds (the lines that connect the nostrils to the outer corners of the mouth) and the marionette lines that extend from the lower lip to the chin. We can often tell in what position a patient sleeps by the depth and location of facial lines.

How do you know whether a wrinkle is sleep crush? If it's diagonal and reversible with a change in sleep position, then it's sleep crush.

In Chapters Thirteen and Fifteen, we'll share various treatments that can help to diminish the appearance of lines that have imprinted onto skin from years of sleeping position habits.

“I never thought I could learn to sleep on my back, but with the help of a special pillow and a nightly pep talk, I've changed a lifelong habit. My reward-after a few weeks, my sleep crush lines disappeared like a newly ironed sheet.”
Dr. Katie Rodan

But here's a piece of advice you can put into effect tonight and immediately share with others: train yourself to get off your side and sleep on your back. For lifelong side or facedown sleepers, this may feel uncomfortable at first, but you will get used to it. If you just can't train yourself to stay on your back through the night, try the Therapeutica Sleeping Pillow, which is specially contoured to support the head and cradle the neck. We've had patients who have noticed fewer wrinkles after using this special pillow for only a week.

Morning eyelid puffiness is another good reason to get into the habit of sleeping on your back. Sleeping position can lead to lymphedema or fluid retention in the tissue around the eyes, particularly if you are prone to these conditions. As skin ages and becomes slack, puffiness becomes even more pronounced. Sleeping on your back, particularly propped up with your head raised above your heart, can help alleviate these under-eye bags.

i National Sleep Foundation. 2008. “Sleep in America poll: Summary of Findings.”

ii Stegman, Samuel J.,MD. 1987. “Sleep creases”. American Journal of Cosmetic Surgery 4:277-280