

NAPS

Sleeping in the 21st century



Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, people lived stress-free lives. They would wake up at their own pace, work at their own pace, eat at their own pace, and sleep for at least 7 hours each night. They were always rested and relaxed, their brains were refreshed and fully active, and no one ever fell asleep behind the wheel while driving to or from work...

What is a nap?

Technically speaking, a nap is a short period of sleep, usually in the daytime taken when one becomes drowsy during the day or as a traditional daily practice. Some cultures incorporate naps into their daily routines; China, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, India, Iran, Italy (southern), Macedonia, North Africa, the Philippines, Spain, Taiwan and Vietnam, to name a few... Generally speaking, countries where the weather is warm, or where midday meals are traditionally heavy incorporate naps, or siestas, into their routine. But are naps good for you? Don't they just make you even drowsier?

Benefits & kind of naps

Napping has been found to be quite beneficial. Napping for 20 minutes can help refresh the mind, improve overall alertness, boost mood and increase productivity. Prolonged naps, those exceeding 30 minutes, can lead to sleep inertia, causing the subject to be groggy after the nap. Obviously, if you're looking to nap because your daily pace is depriving you of a good night's sleep, you don't fall into the after-a-heavy-meal category... What you need is a "power-nap". Meaning? A short sleep which terminates before the occurrence of deep sleep or slow-wave sleep. During stage 1, which is light sleep, we drift in and out of

sleep and can be awakened easily. Our eyes move very slowly and muscle activity slows. When we enter stage 2 sleep, our eye movements stop and our brain waves become slower, with occasional bursts of rapid waves called sleep spindles. In stage 3, extremely slow brain waves called delta waves begin to appear, interspersed with smaller, faster waves. By stage 4, the brain produces delta waves almost exclusively. It is very difficult to wake someone during stages 3 and 4, which together are called deep sleep. During REM sleep, our breathing becomes more rapid, irregular, and shallow, our eyes jerk rapidly in various directions, and our limb muscles become temporarily paralyzed. When people awaken during REM sleep, they often describe bizarre and illogical tales – dreams. So, the concept of a "power-nap" consists of waking up before reaching deep sleep; which generally sets the time of the nap at between 18 to 25 minutes depending on the individual. People who regularly take power-naps may develop a good idea of what duration works best for them. Power-naps may be taken regularly even when schedules allow a full night's sleep.

Performance & Naps

Studies demonstrate that naps are as good as a night of sleep for some types of memory tasks. And just in case you're wondering if sleep is all that important anyway... The following information might just cast a light on the topic for you. Sleep appears necessary for our nervous systems to work properly. Too little sleep leaves us drowsy and unable to concentrate the next day. It also leads to impaired memory and physical performance and reduced ability to carry out math calculations. If sleep deprivation continues, hallucinations and mood swings may develop.

Without sleep, neurons may become so depleted in energy or so polluted with byproducts of normal cellular activities that they begin to malfunction. Sleep also may give the brain a chance to exercise important neuronal connections that might otherwise be damaged from lack of activity.

Nap v/s Deep Sleep

Deep sleep coincides with the release of growth hormone in children and young adults. Since proteins are the building blocks needed for cell growth and for repair of damage from factors like stress and ultraviolet rays, deep sleep may truly be "beauty sleep." Activity in parts of the brain that control emotions, decision-making processes, and social

interactions is drastically reduced during deep sleep, suggesting that this type of sleep may help people maintain optimal emotional and social functioning while they are awake. Some studies even suggest that nerve signaling patten repetition, which occurs during sleep, may help encode memories and improve learning. So the nitty-gritty fact of it is, without sleep, your memory, cognitive ability, social life, growth and physical performance to name a few will deteriorate. So whether you do it at night, like the inhabitants of that stress-free land far, far away, or during the day through power-naps, make sure you give you body the rest it needs from the ever-demanding lives we now lead.



Practical steps to help you get the most of your power-nap:

1. Find a good place to nap.
Napping at work - Some employers provide a place for employees to nap. If your place of employment isn't nap-friendly, you can take a power nap in your car.
Napping on the road - If you're driving, find a rest area to park in. If it's nighttime, park in a well-lit area and lock all of your doors.
2. Turn off your mobile phone and any other potential distractions. Putting on headphones with relaxing music may help.
If you're sleeping during the day and find that bright light inhibits your ability to sleep, wear sunglasses or use an eye mask to simulate darkness.
3. Have caffeine right before you nap. This may sound counterintuitive since caffeine is a stimulant, but it won't kick in immediately. Taking a "caffeine nap" in which 200mg of caffeine are consumed right before a 20-minute nap will not only improve your performance, but it'll also lessen how sleepy you feel once you wake up.[3]
4. Set your alarm clock. Generally, you should set your alarm for twenty-five minutes. Put your alarm across the room so that you have to get up to turn it off.
5. Outside of your office door, which should be closed at this point, post up a sign that says you are power-napping.
6. Get up as soon as the alarm goes off. Sleeping for any longer than 20 minutes will be counterproductive. A half hour can lead to sleep inertia, making you feel sluggish and more tired than ever.
7. Follow up with physical activity. Get your blood flowing with a few jumping jacks or push-ups, or a little bit of jogging in place. Washing your face and exposing yourself to bright light (e.g. sunlight) can help you feel more awake as well.

This article is developed
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