



Napping



WHAT IS THE BENEFIT OF NAPPING?

While a short nap at work cannot reverse severe sleep debt, it can reduce sleepiness and improve performance. As well as the immediate benefits for alertness and performance, napping has long term benefits – people who nap at least twice a week have a 12% lower incidence of coronary heart disease.

HOW LONG?

A 20-minute nap boosts productivity by improving alertness, focus, ability to retain information, mood and job satisfaction, and speeds up long term memory consolidation. Keeping the nap to 20 minutes means you are less likely to fall into deep sleep, so you don't wake up feeling groggy.

Where a longer break is available, a 90-minute nap should enable you to obtain a full sleep cycle, meaning you benefit from light, deep, and dreaming sleep, and will make it more likely that you will awake from light sleep, thus minimising the grogginess experienced on waking (sleep inertia). This grogginess occurs at its worst when we wake from deep sleep – completing a full sleep cycle means that you come back in to light sleep before waking.

For a double-performance boost, take a 'caff-nap': drink 150mg of caffeine (approx. 2 coffees), set an alarm for 20 minutes, and lie-down to nap. Walk around for around 10 minutes after waking to dissipate any sleep inertia (the groggy feeling you experience when waking, linked with reduced performance). Washing your face and light exercise may also help you wake up fully.

WHEN?

It is easiest to nap during the deep night (0200-0600hrs) and the mid-afternoon (1300-1500hrs), when sleepiness is naturally elevated. Avoid napping within three hours of bedtime, as this may make it difficult to fall asleep at night.

WHERE?

The napping environment should be cool, quiet, dark and comfortable, with lie-flat surfaces (it takes 50% longer to fall asleep when sitting upright). Make sure you won't be disturbed, silence your phone and use a 'do not disturb' sign. Make sure that your colleagues know that you are napping, and where you are, so that they don't accidentally disturb you, but can also find you in case of an emergency. If you are a driver, try to take a nap away from your vehicle (e.g., in a break area), but if this is not possible, lock the doors, and recline your seat as much as possible.

CAN I NAP TOO MUCH?

If you feel the need to nap regularly to get through the day, especially if you are working during the day and sleeping at night, this might be an indicator that you are experiencing sleep disruption at night. If this goes on for an extended period, then you may benefit from discussing your sleep patterns with a doctor. Remember however, that there are cultural differences regarding the practice of napping (e.g., in Spain, afternoon naps are commonplace) and that some research has shown the positive effects of napping for dealing with the post-lunch dip in the alertness rhythm.

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WHAT CAN THE COMPANY DO?

Encourage a napping culture

- Napping improves performance, productivity, wellbeing and reduces sleep debt, so should be encouraged across the organisation wherever practical
- Introduce a napping policy, through the company Fatigue Management Plan, particularly for night-work, or shifts that are likely to reduce sleep (e.g., early shifts, extended hours, long shifts, long driving). The policy should:
 - State who can nap, when, and where – and who needs to be informed that an employee is napping
 - State maximum duration of naps, and time for recovery from sleep inertia
- Ensure that the facilities for napping are suitable
- Encourage napping outside of work, particularly before night shifts
- Encourage pre-emptive napping; workers should not wait until they are experiencing performance decrements before considering a nap.

When naps are not enough...

- If a worker is experiencing severe fatigue – for example, due to very limited sleep the night before (less than five or six hours) or is experiencing microsleeps and is making mistakes due to their fatigue – a nap might not be enough to ensure that their performance levels are safe for work. The napping policy should allow for rotation of workers to non-safety critical tasks. If the worker is so fatigued that they cannot complete their work safely, the policy should allow the supervisor to stop the worker's work/cut the workday short so that the employee can have a longer recovery break.

Key references

Naska A et al. "Siesta in Healthy Adults and Coronary Mortality in the General Population". *Archives Internal Medicine* 167. 2007. p296-301.

Rosekind MR et al. R Curtis Graeber, David F. Dinges, Linda J. Connell, Michael S. Rountree, Cheryl L. Spinweber, Kelly A. Gillen (1994) "Crew Factors in Flight Operations IX: Effects of Planned Cockpit Rest on Crew Performance and Alertness in Long-Haul Operations". NASA Technical Memorandum 108839, 1994.