
Health Benefits of Napping

With the hectic pace of day-to-day life, many people don't get the recommended amount of sleep each night. According to the National Sleep Foundation, adults typically need between seven and nine hours of sleep per night in order to function at their best. Getting a few less hours for even a few nights in a row can have the same effect as staying awake for 24 hours straight. And, over time, chronic sleep debt¹ can contribute to fatigue,² decreased immune function,^{1,3} increased stress levels,⁴ reduced attention span,⁵ negative mood and work performance,⁶ and declined cognitive performance.⁷

When someone is tired or didn't get enough sleep, napping may be a way to temporarily boost energy levels as well as other benefits. A nap is defined as a short period of sleep that usually happens during the day. The duration of a nap can be anywhere from as little as 10 minutes to an hour or more depending on the person and situation. Anyone can enjoy a nap, but the goal is to help optimize naps to get the most benefits.

Napping Benefits

Napping can be related to several benefits depending on the duration, frequency, and even the person taking the nap. Studies have shown that napping can:

- Reduce sleepiness.
- Improve cognitive performance⁸ such as decision-making skills, as well as memorization and recall.⁷
- Increase alertness, attention, and energy levels.⁸
- Improve mood.⁸
- Reduce psychological stress levels.⁸
- Support a healthy immune response.⁹
- Enhance creativity.⁸

Science behind naps:

The sleep cycle consists of 4 phases. The first 3 are NREM (non-rapid eye movement) and the final is REM (rapid eye movement): In general sleep cycles can range from 90-110 minutes. Although naps can vary in duration based on the time available, the perfect nap duration is truly individual. Waking up within the proper time frame might enhance a nap for optimal outcome and benefits. Keep in mind that the time it takes to fall asleep can vary from person to person. Naps that range between 10 to 60 minutes can be associated with positive mood and self-reported alertness. However, a 30-minute nap appears to be the best when taking practicality and benefits into consideration.¹⁰

Sleep Phase	Duration (minutes)	What Happens Internally	Benefits When Napping Includes This Phase
Stage 1: N1 (NREM) Non rapid eye movement	1-5 minutes	Light sleep, Maintained regular breathing and skeletal muscle tone.	Creativity support. ¹¹
Stage 2: N2 (NREM)	25 minutes or more	Deeper sleep. Drops in heart rate and body temperature. Brain engages to help with memory consolidation. ¹²	Memory benefits, improved learning, improved performance and alertness, feeling restored ¹³
Stage 3: N3 (NREM)	30-60 minutes	Referred to as slow wave sleep (SWS). With age, less time is spent in this phase, and more is spent in N2. Body repair occurs in this phase (including muscle repair and immune strengthening). Most difficult phase to wake up from. (Associated with groggy feeling 30-60 minutes after waking in this phase).	More time spent in slow-wave sleep (SWS) is associated with memory consolidation. ¹⁴
Stage 4: REM Rapid eye movement	10-60 minutes	Associated with dreaming but not associated with feeling well rested. Only skeletal muscles in the eyes and diaphragm move during this phase. Increases in neurotransmitter and brain activity.	Enhanced emotional recognition and memory. ¹⁵

The following is a list of tips and tricks to help you make the most of naptime:

- Choose a dark, quiet, comfortable place where you can relax.
- Try to limit the amount of noise and light in the room, and make sure the temperature is comfortable.
- Choose a time that works for you, and aim to nap at that time each day to establish a routine. You may find that restricting your naps to early afternoon (between 1:00 pm and 3:00 pm, or an hour or two after lunch) is less likely to interfere with your nighttime sleep patterns.
- Set an alarm on your cell phone, watch, or computer so you don't sleep for too long.
- If you're napping at the office, try closing your door and hanging a sign that says, "will return in 20 minutes." Alternatives to this are napping in your car or at home.
- Wherever you nap, bring along something that you associate with sleep. Some ideas include a sleep mask, neck pillow, relaxing playlist and headphones, cozy blanket, warm socks, and lavender essential oil to dab on your pulse points.
- Keep in mind that longer naps may be accompanied by a period of grogginess. Give yourself time to wake fully before returning to any activity that requires a quick or sharp response.
- Consider having some caffeine before your nap, caffeine may boost levels of alertness upon waking. This may also help those who feel groggy upon waking from a nap.¹⁶
- Consider using a sleep tracking device to monitor your sleep and how naps impact your energy levels.

- There is some concern that naps can disrupt circadian rhythms¹⁷ in older adults. If a daytime nap disrupts your sleep in the evening, consider changing the duration or timing of the nap.
- Needing to consistently nap to get through the day, experiencing chronic fatigue, or if night-time sleep is constantly disrupted warrants talking to a doctor to investigate for other potential underlying issues.

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