

WELLNESS TIPS

TO TAKE A NAP? (Go for it!)

Last week's Wellness Tips discussed sleep – strategies for facilitating good sleep and a regular sleep routine. Today's tips focus in on naps and why taking a regular nap can be beneficial.

Human circadian rhythm, which regulates the sleep-wake cycle, is biphasic. People tend to be most alert 3-4 hours after their natural awakening time (not necessarily the time they arise) and again 12-18 hours later. And there tends to be a dip in alertness approximately 8 hours after arising, occurring around mid-day. This is the traditional siesta time in some cultures. It is also the time of a postprandial energy dip, especially if a mid-day meal has been heavy.

Monophasic sleepers (those who consolidate sleep into one period) tend to experience the second energy boost to a lesser degree than biphasic sleepers (those who sleep in two periods, typically a daily nap).

Research on naps identifies several potential benefits. Naps provide an additional boost to that second period of increased alertness in the evening, information retention, and learning. Naps can improve focus and memory and contribute to improved mood. There are also physical health benefits such as lower blood pressure.

The timing and length of naps is important. Regular, well-timed naps don't interfere with nighttime sleep. In general, shorter naps are most effective. They are lighter sleep, in the earlier sleep stages and easier to awaken from feeling refreshed.

Naps more than 30 minutes long are approaching deeper sleep cycles and more than 90 minutes, REM sleep. At these times, sleep inertia is likely to occur, with more difficulty waking up, feeling sluggish, groggy, and more tired.

Longer naps and naps later in the day are more likely to interfere with nighttime sleeping and exacerbate insomnia. Later naps tend to be longer and very late naps can run into and combine with nighttime sleep, especially if sleep deprivation is present. If naps are more than 100 minutes long, that may be an indication of need for more sleep at night.

NAP TIPS

- + Time your nap for when you are feeling least alert – typically 7-8 hours after awakening.
- + Take your nap earlier rather than later, usually before 2-3 PM. Earlier naps tend to be naturally shorter.

- + Plan on 15-20 minutes for your nap. This is lighter sleep and easier to awaken while feeling refreshed.
- + Stick to your nap routine.
- + Noise cancelling headphones can be helpful.
- + Find the right environment. Your bed might be TOO comfortable! Darkness helps, or an eye mask.
- + Your body temp will drop, so make sure you will be warm enough.
- + Caffeine. The literature has contradictory recommendations. While most say to have caffeine after your nap, some say it's ok have right before your nap because the effects of caffeine won't kick in for 20 - 30 minutes. You might need to experiment to see what works for you.

Well timed naps can contribute a boost to alertness, recall, and learning in the second half of the day. Napping is a skill and may take some practice to get it down as a regular routine, especially if you are having difficulty dialing down your brain and turning off activating or worrying thoughts. And as with sleep in general, everyone's needs are different. Some people are more able to nap and benefit more. If you are considering napping more regularly, try it out and see what works for you, with the goal of increasing alertness without disrupting your night sleep routine.

Wozniak states "the value of the nap increases in proportion to the degree in which your work depends on your brain and the quality of your thinking." Consider giving it a try!

Also be aware that daytime tiredness can be an indicator of health problems such as diabetes or depression. Consult with your health care provider if you have concerns.

As always, feel free to contact MSCC counselors with questions or concerns and to schedule an appointment.

Stay well and stay healthy!

Liz Schacht elizabeth-schacht@uiowa.edu

MSCC osac-mscc@uiowa.edu 319-335-8056 1240 MERF

If you would like to review previous Wellness Tips, check the CCOM Medical Student Counseling Center Website:

<https://medicine.uiowa.edu/md/student-support/student-counseling/mscc-wellness-programs-and-resources>

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