

Napping: The New Wonder Drug



It's 3 in the afternoon, you still have two hours of work left on the clock — but all you want to do is sleep.

There has been much debate about whether naps are beneficial or simply cause grogginess. Some researchers argue adult napping is necessary and has many beneficial effects, such as restoring much-needed energy. That being said, the anti nap camp holds the position that naps only make us more tired and increase idleness.

Dr. Elizabeth Tilak, Colorado State University, is in the "pro-nap" camp. "When I can afford the time, I like to be able to take a nap," Tilak said. In her experience, naps allow her to recharge, which in turn gives her more energy and increases her productivity and ability to focus.

But Tilak isn't the only one casting in her vote for a nap. Jim Lohr, a writer for Scientific American, recently published an article advocating for the afternoon nap. Lohr wrote that the everyday or occasional nap could be beneficial. He noted that there have been several recent studies that demonstrate that the benefits of naps outweigh the perceived negatives, including an increase in mood levels, higher productivity and performance in critical thinking, attention and memory.

However, in Lohr's review, *Can Napping Make Us Smarter?*, he concludes that there are specific factors that contribute to the effectiveness of a nap for an adult. First of all, the adult should be healthy. This generally means getting daily to weekly exercise, eating a balanced diet and maintaining a healthy weight, according to their doctor.

Secondly, if the adult is a "poor sleeper," then napping is not recommended. This includes having difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep. Taking afternoon naps would further disrupt the nighttime sleeping habits.

To receive the maximum benefits of napping, it is important to pay attention to how long the nap is and what time of day the nap occurs. "A 20-minute nap appears to hit the sweet spot," Lohr said. Any longer and the body begins to fall deeper into sleep, causing a "sleep hangover." The individual feels more tired than before and less focused.

The prime time for napping occurs between 1 and 3 p.m. This is due to the body's natural circadian rhythm. The majority of people feel more tired and sleepy at this point in the day. Allison Bielak, a professor in human development and family studies, stated "there is a positive effect of naps on memory of new information (memory recall)."

While the body rests, the brain can put more energy into storing information received throughout the day. A nap can increase your ability to remember more information simply because your brain has a chance to rest.

So the next time you find yourself struggling to stay awake during that after-lunch, mid-afternoon lull, it might be best to trade that \$2 coffee for a free nap.