Putting More Power Into Your Power Nap

How to reap the benefits of napping.

January 17, 2022 By Michael Breus, PhD

I've already shared a lot about all the benefits of napping, and I'll say them again:

- Increase Alertness: Short naps increase our awareness level. In one study, NASA found pilots who took naps for about 25 minutes showed a 54% improvement in their alertness compared to pilots who didn't nap. Those who napped also showed a 34% increase in their job performance.
- Improve Your Stamina: Naps have been linked to better stamina and athletic performance. Runners, for instance, who took short afternoon naps showed improvements in their endurance levels that were not found in runners who didn't nap.
- Improve physical performance. Elite athletes and professional sports teams have increasingly recognized the pivotal role sleep plays in physical performance. Naps can be a powerful tool for athletes at any level, and for people looking to enhance their physical skills. Napping has been shown to improve motor performance and accuracy, as well as speed, strength and reaction time.
- Reduce Your Stress: You're better able to weather stress with a brief nap. Research indicates naps reduce stress and also help moderate blood pressure. A short dose of sleep during the day can help strengthen the body's ability to weather stress, especially if you're short on sleep overall. Recent research shows naps reduce stress and strengthen the immune system in people who are sleep deprived. Napping can also keep blood pressure in check in response to stress.
- Increased Creativity: Power naps have been linked to increased right brain activity — the part of the brain associated with creativity. Naps can facilitate big-picture ideas and help with

visualization — two things that can especially come in handy at work.

- Strengthen Your Immune System: Half-hour naps have been shown to boost production of leukocytes, or white blood cells that help the immune system tackle infectious diseases. This is especially useful in winter, when we're more vulnerable to catching the common cold and other illnesses.
- Improve Concentration and Accuracy. A well-timed nap can improve your focus and ability to concentrate. A 2009 study found that among nappers, brain activity associated with concentration was as strong in the afternoon as in the morning, while non-nappers saw a decline. A short afternoon nap can improve accuracy, as well as provide a boost to short-term memory.
- Help you make better decisions. Naps can improve what's known as cognitive flexibility—that's your ability to shift your thinking among different concepts, and be adaptive to new information. This flexible thinking is critical to judgment and decision making.
- Enhance memory and learning. Sleep is critical to your capacity to learn, and to your brain's ability to process memory. Naps can help to root newly learned information in the brain, and can improve memory recall. One study found that a 60-90-minute nap can aid learning as well as a full night of sleep.
- Elevate your mood. Research suggests naps help improve emotional regulation, including increasing your ability to tolerate frustration, and reducing your tendency to be impulsive.
- Improved creativity. A short nap can elevate activity in the brain's right hemisphere—that's the area of the brain that governs creativity and insight. Napping also fosters greater cross-communication between your brain's right and left hemispheres—encouraging cross-talk between your creative brain and your analytical brain.
- Preserve your physical appearance. Sleep is restorative to the body, inside and out. I think of it as nature's Botox. Sleep deprivation can make you look tired and fatigued, less healthy and less attractive, according to research. Naps that help supplement daily sleep amounts—without interfering with nighttime rest—can keep you looking young, healthy, and full of energy.

Finding time for a midday power nap is a great way to jumpstart the second half of your day. You'll

feel refreshed, less stressed, and more alert.

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