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Power Naps

A power nap (coined by Cornell University social psychologist James Maas) is a short nap, usually 15-20 minutes. There are various durations recommend for a power nap – usually around 20-35 minutes for best results. (Long enough to refresh, but not long enough to generate sleep inertia – that grogginess and lethargy.) People who regularly take power naps usually have a good idea of what duration works best for them. Some people take power naps out of necessity, while others prefer to take power naps even if their schedule allows a full night's sleep.

The short duration of a power nap prevents nappers from entering slow-wave sleep. Waking up after a person has entered this deeper state of sleep can result in a phenomenon known as sleep inertia (causing the person to feel groggy).

Since seminal studies have demonstrated that power naps were as good as a night of sleep on some memory tasks, more sleep laboratories have reported similar results. Many cultures have recognized and promoted the benefits of daily naps, including the tradition of the siesta in Mexico and *inemuri* by workers in many Japanese corporations.

While proponents claim power napping is helpful way to clear out the cobwebs and recharge your battery, others find otherwise and, therefore, the benefits are based solely on personal experience.

Because missing enough sleep can affect your judgment and decision-making, power napping for some can erase sleep deficit and restore optimal performance, while for others it slows down reaction time and communications skills.

Mark Rosekind, PhD, president and chief scientist at Alertness Solutions and a board member of the National Sleep Foundation, reports that while he was a NASA, pilots were given scheduled naps and that sleep for 26-40 minutes boosted their performance 34% and their alertness 54%.

In study conducted at the Center for Sleep and Cognition and the department of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, and published in the American Academy of Sleep Medicine journal *SLEEP*, subjects benefited from taking a nap in performing three memory tasks.

Also, researchers have discovered (in a study published in The Archives of Internal Medicine) that individuals who took a regular 30-minute nap were 37% less likely to die of heart disease (over a six-year period) than those who never napped. Researchers also concluded that power napping was more effective in lowering heart attacks and heart ailments than diet or physical exercise.

Recommendations for successful power naps are:

- If possible, lie down flat.
- Control environmental light (eye mask) and sounds (sponge ear plugs) if necessary.
- Add a blanket or pillow if needed.
- Find out what length of nap works best so you don't wake up groggy or disoriented.
- To ensure proper wake-up time, use a clock, timer or wrist watch.
- Make sure you have privacy; being interrupted undermines the process.
- Tell your co-workers that napping is going to help your mood and productivity – a true fact.
- A regular scheduled of time each day works best for most people.