



CREATIVE NAPPING

When N.A.S.A. published a 1995 study showing how a 26-minute nap improves performance by 34% and alertness by 54%, some people thought they were onto something new... But in fact, naps have been popular since the days of Ancient Rome! To this day, some cultures find it strange if you don't have a break in the middle of the day... And here's why a short snooze can be an effective creative technique, too! What other excuse do you need?!

Sleep on it: As we stress in our Info Sheet, 'Sleep... And Have Ideas!' many people feel better about things after they've 'slept on them'! And if getting some sleep helps you look at things differently, then sleep itself becomes a tool for creativity!

But napping? Yes, even a short nap seems to help recharge the mind and body. Our introduction mentions a 1995 study by N.A.S.A. – the North American Space Agency – that shows a 34% increase in performance and 54% in alertness after a 26 minute nap... Seems to us that this kind of difference helps give you a significantly different ability to tackle issues! But why 26 minutes?

Many people find that, when they doze for half an hour or more, they awaken feeling groggy. That's very likely to be the case because we sleep in stages... If you'd like more detail on this, please see the stultifying bit about sleep stages at the bottom of this Info Sheet.

In a nutshell, though... Half an hour or more takes you into a deeper sleep cycle! To avoid the feeling of grogginess and bad temper associated with waking up twice in one day (!) keep the nap to the optimum 26 minutes!

Two times to pay attention! First, the hypnagogic state: this is what you experience as you fall asleep. It's the drowsy time between being awake but before actually sleeping. Some say that the things that run through their minds as they begin to nod off are incredibly valuable. Interestingly, we hear that both Dali and Edison used this time for creativity by lying down ready to doze while holding a small, solid object in one hand. With a metal tray or pan on the floor below, they then did the following...

Give a little thought to the issues you face or the problem you want solved. Then relax and let your mind wander. As you begin to feel drowsy, just let the feeling wash over you. At the moment you doze off, your hand relaxes completely, the object falls and the noise jolts you awake! Grab your notepad and write down whatever's in your mind – even if it seems completely irrelevant or nonsensical.

But that interrupts the nap!

Yes it does! Sorry... It's also a little hit and miss; some people are just startled and irritated by the noise! So it's not for everyone; we're just saying! However, at the other end of a nap is the moment between sleeping and wakefulness... This is physiologically different!

"Loving your work! The feedback has been superb." Mark Blamire, Director, Blanka / Neue

Try going to sleep while giving thought to what you're working on, take the nap and then, on waking, write down everything you can remember thinking as you came round. It might sound ludicrous, but if you can develop the habit of writing – scrawling, really – what might seem like irrelevant gibberish while still half asleep, you might be pleased to discover some thinking that is very different to that which you produce consciously.

Other Tips

Lie! By that we mean don't sit. It takes people about a 50% longer period of time to nod off in the sitting position!

Get comfy: Your brain's designed to help keep you awake unless you feel safe. So find a dark, warm-enough room, set your alarm, lie down. Then start breathing in slowly and deeply. Close those eyes and let that mind wander...

Need longer? A nap of 30 to 45 minutes creates the groggy state so many people dislike after falling asleep. So if 26 minutes isn't enough, aim for at least 90 minutes! That way you're not fighting your body's natural rhythms. A nap of 90-120 minutes tends to include all stages of sleep, set out below. It's suggested that this improves your memory & creativity and helps clear your mind!

The Really Dull Bit

If you find it difficult to get to sleep, you may rejoice now! For here's an extremely turgid bit of soporific dross about the stages of sleep; it should help you on your way to the land of nod...

There are four main stages of sleep: the first two constitute a lighter portion and initially last for between 10 & 30 minutes; the other two are deeper.

The first stage is so light that you might not even think of it as sleep! It's the gradual letting-the-mind-wander-and-drift-into-a-doze feeling that, if disturbed, one might deny is really part of sleeping at all! But it is, of course, and it often includes that wretched feeling that you're falling!

Second stage: Many scientists now agree that the second stage of sleep is the one in which your brain begins sorting experiences and filing them away! In physical terms, stage two sees you close off to external stimuli... Your brain starts ignoring things that the senses consider commonplace and unthreatening. This stage takes you up to roughly half an hour in the process!

Third stage: This is the doorway to deeper sleep! Your body prepares to enter the Rapid Eye Movement stage; your brain starts generating delta waves, which become more dominant. You're now considered to be in a deep sleep! This continues into stage four...

Fourth stage – REM: This is when you dream vividly! Your body is in a state of paralysis to prevent you acting out your imaginings! But if you have time to reach this stage whilst napping, then you probably aren't as busy as you could be... It occurs about 90-120 minutes after stage one and, when you're done, the cycle starts all over again!

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