

# All praise the nap

What better way to slow down than to have a snooze?  
**Chris Griffiths** explains how a nap can leave you feeling calmer,  
more creative and ready for anything



**W**E ALL KNOW THE feeling of spending the morning in a zombie-like state after dragging ourselves out of bed, despite not managing to get enough sleep. Whether it's our anxiety, our children, or an addictive TV series keeping us up, life often gets in the way. In fact, one in three adults simply doesn't get the seven to nine hours a night recommended by experts.

Consequently, if our sleep deficit builds up over a period of time, our reaction time, judgment and even our vision are worsened. Extended fatigue can also lead to stress and burnout. And indeed, one aim of World Sleep Day (13 March) is to raise awareness about the importance of healthy sleep. But it's not all bad news! You can supplement your sleep with

the habit of napping to help you recover from sleep deprivation.

A short snooze can provide you with a burst of energy, unleash your creativity and boost your concentration when you need it most. Benefiting the mind as well as the body, naps are a great way to take a break from the fast pace of your day, helping to reduce stress, improve concentration and even lowering the risk of a heart attack.

## The art of napping

Though it may sound strange, daytime slumber is a skill and most of us are out of practice since our days in preschool. There are a few things that need to be considered before you hit the hay in the middle of the day.

Timing is everything. A full sleep cycle includes several stages: light sleep, deep sleep and finally, rapid eye

movement (REM) sleep. It's important to keep naps within the light sleep window to avoid entering a state of deep or REM sleep that can cause you to feel groggy or disoriented when you wake up. Keep your nap to 10-30 minutes to enjoy the benefits of light sleep and wake up feeling refreshed and focused. You might like to set a gentle alarm to keep your rest to this length.

The time of day you choose to take your nap can vary depending on your schedule. However, putting your head down when your blood sugar levels start to drop after processing food (usually around 1-3pm) is a good plan.

When it comes to napping during the day, choosing a suitable location can be difficult. If you're at home then a bed or sofa is the obvious place, as long as it's quiet. If you're at work, some forward-thinking companies



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are now offering dedicated spaces for kipping, such as sleep pods. Otherwise, you'll need to find somewhere quiet, dark(ish) and a place where you're unlikely to be disturbed. You could try an empty conference room or even your parked car. It's also much easier to fall asleep if you're lying down or at least reclined. Our body temperature drops while we sleep, so having a jumper or blanket handy will help you to stay warm and comfortable.

It's important to fall asleep feeling calm and a guided meditation app (see overleaf) can help. It's also about giving yourself the permission to take a guilt-free rest, to stop your mind from ruminating.

### Your light-bulb moment

Napping isn't for everyone though, and there are plenty of other ways to

give yourself a break and boost your creative thinking.

For example, you could take a leaf out of Thomas Edison's book. Edison, the inventor of the light bulb, would take naps while seated and with a ball bearing in each hand. Just as he was drifting into sleep, his hands would relax and the ball bearings would fall to the floor, waking him up. Immediately after waking, he would note down any of the ideas that had just come to him.

Alternatively, try harnessing the power of focused daydreaming. This involves absorbing information on a topic or problem and then taking a step back and participating in a slow activity such as taking a walk, listening to music or gardening. By quietening your mind, you'll allow your thoughts to incubate and ultimately arrive

at new and creative solutions that you may not have otherwise discovered had you been trying to solely focus on the problem.

However you embed napping into your day, you're likely to be pleasantly surprised by the benefits to both concentration and imagination that come with those 15 minutes or so of welcome shut-eye. **PM**

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