

The nap manifesto:

what napping can do for you

I t's free, it's nontoxic and it has no dangerous side effects. Hard to believe, with these powerful selling points, that people have to be convinced to nap. But alas, for way too long, napping has been given a bad rap.

Employers want to keep their workers occupied with the business of business. Parents want their children to do homework when they come home from school or at least to play outside instead of "sleeping the day away." University administrators think the sight of students napping on campus sets a bad example. But as the facts pile up, the case for napping becomes too compelling to dismiss.

If you're a closet napper, come out and show some pride . . . help your fellow employees, family members and friends to see the light. And for those of you who still insist on saying, "Give me one good reason why I should nap," science can do better than that. It can give you 20 reasons. Napping will allow you to:

1. Increase your alertness. This is, for many, the most important benefit. Whether you're on the road, observing market trends, diagnosing patients or interacting with clients, staying alert is the most important determinant of your efficiency. NASA studies have conclusively demonstrated that alertness increases by as much as 100 percent after a brief nap, even in well-rested subjects.

2. Speed up your motor performance. While most people think of motor learning in terms of an ability to play guitar chords, improve a swim stroke or perform a plié, you don't have to be a musician, athlete or dancer to benefit from faster motor performance. All of us engage in tasks that involve coordination, whether we're typing at a keyboard, operating machinery, changing a tire or bagging groceries. A Harvard study demonstrated that the speed of a learned motor performance is the same in nappers as in those who have had a full night of sleep.

3. Improve your accuracy. Making mistakes costs time, money, energy and sometimes even people's lives. While greater speed usually involves sacrificing accuracy, napping offers a valuable exemption from this general rule. So whether you shoot baskets or firearms, play sonatas or golf, cut diamonds or hair, a nap helps you get it right.

4. Make better decisions. What are you going to eat for lunch? Should you ask for a raise or wait awhile? What stock should you buy? Or should you sell? Every day, all day, we make decisions—both trivial and huge. Of course, some decisions are so significant that lives can hang in the balance. Airplane takeoffs and landings require high-precision timing and the ability to read, monitor and react to a wide variety of controls. Pilots who are allowed to nap in the cockpit commit fewer judgment errors on takeoff and landings than those who aren't.

5. Improve your perception. Think how much you depend on your eyes, your ears and, to a lesser extent, your taste, touch and smell. Without the ability to fine-tune your sensory/perceptual systems, you wouldn't be able to hone in on the important environmental messages and filter out the mass of distracting sensory information that bombards all of us on a regular basis. Research

shows that a nap can be as effective as a night of sleep in improvement of perceptual skills. Driving, cooking, appreciating music or art, reading, proofreading, quality control and even bird-watching are all enhanced after a nap.

6. Fatten your bottom line. Fatigue-related accidents cost U.S. industry over \$150 million a year. Businesses that allow their employees to nap have shown decreases in errors and increases in productivity. According to the Shiftwork Practices survey issued in 2004 by Circadian Technologies, workmen's comp costs are highest where employees report the most fatigue, and claims at facilities that ban napping are four times higher than those that allow it. Judged by this standard, naps are a bargain.

7. Preserve your youthful looks. Nothing ages you like fatigue. Adding a nap to your regimen will improve skin and tissue regeneration and keeps you looking younger longer. Napping is truly beauty sleep.

8. Improve your sex life. Sleep deprivation dampens sex drive and sexual function. Napping reverses those effects. So nap now and your partner will love you more later.

9. Lose weight. Studies show that sleepy people reach for high-fat, sugar-rich foods more than people who are rested. Take a nap and not only can you resist those potato chips and cheesecake, but you'll be producing more growth hormone that reduces body fat.

10. Reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke. Studies conclusively show that fatigue contributes to hypertension, heart attack, stroke, arrhythmia and other cardiovascular disorders even in otherwise physically fit subjects. Add a nap to decrease your risk for all these maladies and live a longer, healthier life.

11. Reduce your risk of diabetes. Sleep deprivation increases insulin and cortisol levels, which can raise the risk for type 2 diabetes, the sixth leading cause of death in the United States. Napping after meals will build up your defense against diabetes while improving the way you process your sugars.

12. Improve your stamina. Whether you're running a marathon or simply sitting through a series of meetings, a well-planned nap will keep you from fading out before the finish line. Studies have shown that a nap during or after work allows you to be as alert and ready for the second part of your day as if it were a brand-new day. So if you need to finish a deadline project or simply want extra energy to interact more fruitfully with your friends and family after a long day at the office, take a nap first.

13. Elevate your mood. While sleep deprivation causes irritability, depression and anger, napping bathes your brain in serotonin, reversing those effects and creating a more positive outlook.

14. Boost your creativity. It's no wonder that history's great artists and inventors took naps. Napping allows your brain to create the loose associations necessary for creative insight and opens the way for a fresh burst of new ideas.

15. Reduce stress. Stress and anxiety are the result of cortisol being produced in the adrenal glands. By releasing the antidote, growth hormone, a nap can reduce that stress and anxiety and make you a calmer person. So don't worry, start napping.

16. Help your memory. Much of your memory consolidation cannot occur in any meaningful way without sleep. Everything from learning a new language to remembering the periodic table of elements can be improved by adding a short nap between study periods.

17. Reduce dependence on drugs/alcohol. Deprive yourself of needed sleep, and you're more likely to abuse not only caffeine but alcohol and other drugs. A recent study from Denmark showed that people who complain of exhaustion are more likely to abuse drugs. Saying yes to a nap will make you less likely to reach for stimulants to keep you awake and downers to get you to sleep.

18. Alleviate migraines, ulcers and other problems with psychological components. In one way or another, cortisol is involved in all these ailments. By reintroducing growth hormone, napping can reduce their severity. Many doctors actually recommend a cold compress and a nap to relieve migraines.

19. Improve the ease and quality of your nocturnal sleep. Sure, it sounds contradictory, but sleeping during the day helps you sleep better at night. "Overtired" isn't just a figure of speech. Going past the warning signs of fatigue can push you into a slightly manic state in which your body revs up so fast to compensate for lack of sleep that you can be too "wired" to fall asleep when you have the opportunity. Now doctors have begun recommending treatment of syndromes as severe as narcolepsy and excessive daytime sleepiness through a structured program of naps. So nap now and sleep better tonight.

And finally . . .

20. It feels good. Okay, there's no way for science to really measure this, but millions of nappers can't be wrong.