

Should You Be Taking Afternoon Naps? Here's What The Sleep Experts Say



Noma Nazish Contributor ⓘ

ForbesLife

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A short mid-day nap can do wonders for your mood...

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Many of us feel the need to take a mid-afternoon snooze—whether it’s to catch up on lost zzz’s, reduce fatigue or increase alertness. According to a [Pew Research Centre](#) report, one-third of American adults take naps.

Turns out, napping (if done right), can be a part of a healthy sleep routine.

Here’s why napping is good for you:

“There are a host of benefits to napping, including improved alertness, productivity, performance on vigilance tasks and even short-term memory,” says [Dr. Rebecca Robbins](#), sleep scientist at Harvard Medical School, co-author of *Sleep for Success!* and a sleep expert to [Oura](#).

In addition, daily naps can also [lower stress](#), [improve work performance](#), [regulate emotions](#), [fortify your immune system](#) and help [reduce the risk of developing cardiovascular disease](#).

Moreover, “napping allows you to catch up on sleep debt without altering your sleep schedule. It also removes beta-amyloid—a neurotoxin linked to memory loss and Alzheimer’s,” says [Olivia Arezzolo](#), celebrity sleep coach and author of *The Reasons You Are Not Sleeping*.

“For most of us, there is a strong biological tendency toward sleepiness in the afternoon, making it a great time to squeeze in some extra shut-eye,” notes Dr. Robbins.

However, despite its numerous benefits, it’s important to note that napping is *not* a substitute for a full night of sleep. “Napping can be a bandaid, even a lifeline for some like new mothers or shift workers. It can also be part of a healthy sleep routine for people with a more regular schedule. However, it is meant to work as a supplement to—not a replacement for—regular sleep at night,” says Dr. Robbins.

She also recommends avoiding naps altogether if you are experiencing insomnia. “Those struggling with insomnia would be much better served not napping, and building their ‘sleep pressure’—or the urge for nighttime slumber—so that when their bedtime comes around they are optimally tired and stand the best chance of getting nighttime sleep,” tells Dr. Robbins.

How long should you nap?

“When you wake up feeling groggy after taking a nap, it’s what we call ‘sleep inertia’. This is the transitional state between sleep and wakefulness where there is still a desire to return to sleep. It feels like you have a ‘sleep hangover’. This can happen depending on how long you napped for,” says Alanna McGinn, founder of the [Good Night Sleep Site](#) and host of [This Girl Loves Sleep](#) podcast.

“If we look at an adult’s sleep cycle, a full-cycle lasts for around 90 minutes. Throughout that time we are cycling through stages of light and deep sleep phases,” tells McGinn. “When we enter stage three of sleep, at around the 30-minute mark we are in a deeper stage of slumber so when you wake up from a nap after 30 to 60 minutes this is where you wake up feeling really sluggish,” explains the sleep expert.

To avoid that, it’s best to limit your nap to 15 to 20 minutes or if you can really commit to the nap, rest for a full sleep cycle of 90 minutes so that you are waking as your body is cycling into a phase of lighter sleep, suggests McGinn.

A power nap of 10 to 20 minutes can boost your energy and alertness without the feeling of sleep inertia when you wake up, says McGinn. Meanwhile, a 90-minute snooze can boost your memory and creativity. This is ideal for those who are studying for a big test as studies have shown that napping this long helps cement in all the new information you’ve learned, adds the sleep specialist.

In terms of the time of day, “our body temperature dips in the afternoon between approximately 2 and 4 p.m. Such a dip in temperature is one of the factors that happen in conjunction with sleep onset at night, further increasing our urge to sleep in the afternoon,” notes Dr. Robbins. “But really you can take one whenever you need it and time allows, as long as it’s not too close to your regular bedtime,” adds the sleep researcher.