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THE DAILY BEAST POLITICS ENTERTAINMENT WORLD U.S. NEWS TECH **HEALTH**

TECH + HEALTH 08.12.14



13 Tips for the Best Nap Ever

By Kelly Fitzpatrick for Life by DailyBurn

A mid-afternoon nap of just 10 minutes can help you stay alert for more than two hours when you're sleep deprived, according to research from the journal *Sleep*. But it's not just insomniacs who benefit from some midday zzz's.

Napping can also improve alertness, performance, creativity and provide a slew of other benefits among the well-rested and yawning masses alike, says psychology professor and nap researcher Dr. Sara Mednick, PhD, in her book *Take a Nap!* So how can you harness the power of the restorative nap? Read on for our expert-approved tips for the perfect snooze.

When to Nap

There's a time and a place for playing catch-up, and while some strategies are universal, others will depend a bit more on your individual lifestyle.

1. Consider your sleep schedule. Mednick's book notes that the best time to nap depends on when you wake up. For example, early risers who are up at 5 a.m. should nap at 1 p.m., while those who get up at 9 a.m. shouldn't nap until 3 p.m. You can use Melnick's interactive Nap Wheel to find your own best wake-up time.

2. Choose afternoons. It wasn't until the late 80s that researchers began to hone in on the value of napping. One of

A vertical sidebar on the right side of the page. It features a stylized 'Y' logo at the top, followed by a red circle with a white 'L' and the word 'LAPTOP' below it. Further down is an orange logo and the text 'YOGA 3 PRO'. At the bottom is the Intel logo with 'inside CORE i5' and the text 'PERFORMANCE WITH INTEL® CC'.

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▶ their first observations about daytime sleep was that the dreaded mid-afternoon slump is part of human nature. They found that, left to our own devices, humans tend to sleep once for a long period at night, and once for a shorter period in the afternoon. So if you can schedule in an early p.m. siesta, there's no sense in fighting

those droopy eyelids — Mother Nature approves.

3. Think ahead. While staying up late (or all night) isn't good for you, if you're going to do it, a nap may be a good idea. Researchers have found that a long nap — of two hours or more — can significantly improve alertness for up to 24 hours. Moreover, a preparatory nap counteracts the effects of sleep deprivation better than a nap taken after the missed sleep.

4. Put safety first. Sleeping only six to seven hours a night can double your risk of falling asleep at the wheel, compared to getting eight hours. However, a 30-minute nap has been shown to improve alertness and prevent unsafe driving nearly as well as coffee, according to one study. Young adults in particular benefitted the most from a quick snooze.

5. Preempt a night-shift. Anyone who works hours other than the traditional 9-to-5 can reap benefits from napping, too. A study of night-workers found that while an evening nap plus caffeine was the best way to stay awake, a nap alone also improved alertness — especially helpful for those who don't like to rely on caffeine to stay awake.

Nap Smarter

So how do you make the most of your precious nap-time minutes? These tips will help you fall asleep faster and wake up refreshed.

6. Time it right. Studies have tested a wide range of nap times, but for most individuals, it seems between 10 and 20 minutes of sleep is best. Longer naps can cause sleep inertia, or a period of grogginess and reduced performance caused by waking in the middle of deep sleep.

7. Get a wake-up call. "Setting an alarm is really helpful for napping," says Dr. Janet Kennedy, Ph.D, clinical psychologist and founder of NYC Sleep Doctor. "It can be hard to fall asleep if you are worried about whether you will wake up at the right time. Setting an alarm takes the pressure off."

8. Find your napping happy place. For the perfect nap, you want to find a dark, quiet place to lay down. If necessary, use an eye mask, ear plugs, or white noise to help tune out disruptions. (Of course, if you've got a few thousand bucks to spare, you could always get one of these nap pods. Or, the more budget-friendly alternative: the ostrich pillow.)

9. Order up a nappuccino. A "caffeine nap," or a quick cup of something

caffeinated followed by a nap, outperforms both a nap or caffeine independently. Because caffeine takes about 20 minutes to kick in, drinking a cup before a 10 to 20 minute nap means the caffeine will start working just as you wake up, leaving you feeling refreshed and alert.

10. Try meditation. You know the feeling: You're practically falling asleep with your eyes open, but as soon as you get all hunkered down for a few zzz's, your mind is suddenly racing. Try calming yourself for sleep with meditation techniques like breathing and visualizations. Need more guidance? Try one of these eight apps for guided meditation.

Who Shouldn't Nap

For some, it's worth noting, napping isn't always the best bet. Here's how to tell if you're just not cut out for cat naps.

11. Go with your instincts. Dr. Kennedy notes that, "Some people just aren't good nappers." If all of the above tips don't work for you (you can't fall asleep, don't wake up alert, etc.), you just might have to skip the midday option and make sure you're getting enough shut-eye at your regularly scheduled bedtime.

12. Don't lose sleep at night. Got a case of insomnia? Dr. Kennedy says napping isn't a good bet for you. "If a person is having difficulty sleeping at night — either falling asleep or prolonged night waking — I advise against napping at all," she says.

13. Avoid being "that guy." Obviously, some work places are not nap-friendly. A mid-afternoon snooze at the office might suggest to your boss that you're not that into your work. You might not want to lose your job for a nap — unless, of course, you can land a gig at one of these places.

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