

Power nap improves performance, health

Written by PHILIP S. CHUA, M.D., FACS, FPCS
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“MOST American adults sleep poorly,” according to a study of the National Sleep Foundation on 1,506 adults.

The findings are obviously applicable to most of us in general.

Lack of sleep translates to lesser mental acuity and concentration, poorer health, greater driving hazards, reduced productivity, and diminished sex drive.

Sleep experts recommend a minimum of 7 to 9 hours of sleep in 24 hours.

The survey showed that adults sleep an average of 6.9 hours a night.

The few minutes to 3 hours of sleep deprivation is enough to cause problems.

Seventy-five percent of adults reported they frequently have difficulty in sleeping, like problems in initiating sleep, waking up often during the night, and/or snoring, waking up too early, and feeling unrefreshed and tired.

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Many also stated that they ignored the problem, and some do not even think they actually have any sleep deficit.

Only about 50% of those surveyed stated they were able to sleep well most of the time.

Twenty-five percent thought their sleep problem had adverse effects on their daily routines.

Richard Gelula of the Sleep Foundation said there's a link between sleep and quality of life.

"People who sleep well, in general, are happier and healthier," said Gelula.

"But when sleep is poor or inadequate, people feel tired or fatigued, their social and intimate relationship suffer, work productivity is negatively affected, and they make our roads more dangerous by driving while sleepy and less alert."

Obviously, the quality of sleep, besides the number of hours, is very important.

Chris Drake, senior scientist at the Henry Ford Sleep Center in Detroit and co-chair of the 2005 poll task force, stated that some of the nation's sleep habits can be attributed to an "always-on-the-go society."

The commercial world of today stretches business to 24 hours a day, with 24-hour pharmacy, restaurants, casinos, supermarkets, etc., so people tend to stay up late, watch late night shows on television, surfing the web on the Internet, etc.

All these reduce people's time to sleep.

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And some people even need more than 9 hours of sleep to feel refreshed and rested.

This study also showed:

(1) Sixty percent of adults stated they have driven a vehicle while drowsy from lack of sleep the past year; and 4 in 10 reported they have had an accident or near accident because of tiredness or falling asleep at the wheel.

(2) Seventy-five percent claims their partner has a sleep problem, snoring as the most common complaint.

(3) Four out of 10 of those surveyed reported lack of sleep adversely affected their sexual relationship, having lost interest in sex, having poorer performance or having sex less often.

(4) Seventy percent claimed that their physician never asked them about their sleep.

The recommendations of the National Sleep Foundation and experts in the field are abstinence from any stimulant, coffee and alcohol before bedtime, and to seek medical help if they think they are having sleep problem and/or snoring, or not getting enough rest at night.

Lack of sleep reduces the normal “recharging time of our body battery, our energy source” causing a chain of reactions in our physiology and body chemistry.

This “lo-bat” condition leads to physical and mental stresses to our system.

All these alter the normal homeostasis (internal balance) within us, weakening our immune

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system, and increasing our risk of developing metabolic diseases, hypertension (high blood pressure), stroke and heart attack, among others, or aggravating existing illnesses.

Here is where power naps come in, if you have the luxury and opportunity to enjoy one every day.

Power napping is like “trickle-charging our battery.”

A power nap is usually taken between 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., the primetime, lasting between 10 minutes and 30 minutes.

Many countries of the world close up shops in the afternoon and reopen after 4 p.m. to enjoy that tradition and practice of having a power nap.

However, a power nap longer than half an hour increases the risk of “sleep inertia,” which gives one the uncomfortable groggy sensation which lingers.

A power naps provides a healthy opportunity to reset the system and get a “power surge” and burst of alertness and physical strength, an amazing energy and memory boost, which even helps in decision-making and problem-solving.

Naps reduce crankiness, increases cognitive skills, performance, and creativity, and leads to a more pleasant outlook for the remainder of the day.

It also reduces accidents and mistakes, and lowers stress and even lowers the risk for cardiovascular diseases.

I personally believe in the magic of power naps.

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A NASA study among military pilots and astronauts revealed “that a 40-minute nap improved performance by 34% and alertness 100%.

A nap is superior to coffee or any “energy drink,” because caffeine decreases memory performance, contrary to what people think.

One must be consistent in their power nap routine, keeping a regular schedule and not napping for more than 30 minutes, best in a dark room and comfortable environment.

Naps are most especially good and beneficial for young children and, actually, for all of us.

The popular historical figures who are “nappers” include, among others, Leonardo DaVinci, Napoleon Bonaparte, Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, John F. Kennedy, Winston Churchill, Ronald Reagan, George W. Bush, Salvador Dali, Margaret Thatcher, John D. Rockefeller and Yogi Berra.

Prevent a “lo-bat.”

Trickle-charge your system daily.

Take a power nap if you can.

It does wonders!

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