



# UPDATE

## TO NAP OR NOT TO NAP?

### (THAT IS THE QUESTION)

The demands of modern life leave many of us sleep deprived at least some of the time. Either time in bed at night is forfeited to allow for “higher priority” activities, or stress/worries/illness undermine sleep quality even when bedtime is sufficient. Does research support that a short afternoon nap is actually helpful? Yes.

Given that a post-lunch rest can be an appropriate time to nap in the workplace, Takahashi and Arito[1] examined the effects of a 15 minute nap right after lunch, following a night on which sleep was restricted to < 4 hours. The nap improved both subjective sleepiness and accuracy of logical reasoning measured later in the afternoon, although the nap only partly reversed the effect of the sleep deficit. A measure of alertness (latency of the P300 event-related potential) also showed improvement after napping.

In an earlier study in non-sleep deprived subjects, the same authors found that a 15 minute nap was more beneficial than a 45 minute nap. This apparent paradox can be explained by the observation that the 15 minute nap does not allow for development of deep non-REM sleep, as sleep inertia (where you wake up groggy) correlates positively with the amount of deep non-REM sleep. Other studies suggest that short naps produce benefit only after partial (not total) sleep deprivation.

A good night’s sleep is best, but a short afternoon nap can help compensate for partial sleep loss.

If you would like a copy of this article, contact the Sleep Disorders Center at (714) 771-8950.

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[1] Takahashi, M., Arito, H. Maintenance of alertness and performance by a brief nap after lunch under prior deep sleep deficit. Sleep 2000; 23: 813-819.