

Q&A: Is there a wrong way—or time—to nap?

July 14 2023, by Tiffany Casper



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I am retired, and although I generally enjoy less hectic days now, I keep

busy. Part of my routine includes trying to squeeze in a nap on most afternoons. My wife tells me that I'm doing it wrong because I often wake up groggy. Is there a wrong way—or time—to nap?

ANSWER: Closing your eyes for a few minutes during your busy day may seem like a good idea. It can refresh and recharge you. Is there a wrong way to nap? Only if the naps cause negative effects on other aspects of your life.

For your daily nap routine, it's important to consider the time of day and length of time you nap, as these can provide benefits or create problems.

On the plus side, a nap can improve your mood, speed your [reaction time](#), improve your memory, reduce fatigue and increase your alertness. A regular nap can make your afternoon more productive.

There are some potential drawbacks of napping every day. First is [sleep inertia](#). It's the temporary grogginess and feeling disoriented after a nap. This can become a problem if you have places to be or tasks to complete after you wake up from your nap. Regular naps can interfere with your nighttime sleep routine, too, especially if your naps are too long or close to bedtime. If you experience insomnia or poor sleep quality at night, napping may worsen these problems. Short naps are the best when trying to avoid interference with nighttime sleep.

Follow these four tips to get the most out of your naps:

- Set aside an allotted amount of time. If you wake up feeling groggy after a nap, you're sleeping too long. The ideal nap length is between 15 and 30 minutes. If you want to make naps a part of your daily routine, have a planned [time of day](#) and length of time to keep your schedule on track.
- Plan to take naps in the afternoon. The ideal time to nap is

around 2 p.m. or 3 p.m. This is because you are likely to experience a lower level of alertness or sleepiness following lunch. You're also more likely to avoid interference with nighttime sleep if you nap around this time. However, some people may adjust their napping times to fit their work or school schedules.

- Create a tranquil environment. Some people struggle to sleep during the day, but there are actions you can take to help you become more relaxed. Eliminate distractions when napping. Turn off any screens, including your phone. Find a quiet space with minimal light. Adjusting the [room temperature](#) to what is comfortable for you also can make your space more relaxing.
- Give yourself time to wake up. It's normal to wake up a little groggy after a nap, but that feeling should dissipate shortly. Allow yourself enough time after your nap to wake up before resuming activities, so you are alert and ready to tackle the rest of your day.

Before lying down to take a daily nap, you may want to think about why you began taking these naps. If you've been working the [night shift](#) or are a new parent, you probably have reason to be closing your eyes for a while. On the other hand, if you feel that a nap is essential to your daily functioning, you may have a bigger health problem that should be addressed with your health care team.

Talking to your health care team is the best way to find out why you're experiencing increased fatigue. The reasons for your exhaustion could be related to anything from having a sleep disorder such as [sleep apnea](#) to a side effect from a new medication.

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