THE BENEFITS OF DAYTIME SLEEP

Our sleep cycles are not as steady and consistent as we might think. In fact, they are actually quite dynamic, and change throughout our lifetime. Balogh (2018), explains that as we get older, some specific trends in changes are:

- **Delayed onset to sleep**: Where it takes us longer to fall asleep
- **Advanced circadian rhythm:** Which refers to shifts in our sleep-wake cycle where we go to bed earlier and also get up earlier
- **Reduced deep sleep**: A stage in our sleep cycle that is important for memory consolidation
- **Overall decreased duration of sleep**

There are biological and social factors contributing to these changes in our sleep cycle as we age. Biological factors include reduced daytime activity and lack of sunlight exposure to regulate our circadian rhythm. Acute or chronic medical conditions, as well as stress, can also disrupt our sleep cycle. Social factors that can negatively affect sleep include changes in residence or work, such as when one retires or moves into a new home, hospitalization, social isolation and bereavement.

To help improve sleep for older adults, the concept of sleep hygiene was introduced. Sleep hygiene consists of guidelines to help those with sleep difficulties develop and maintain healthy wake and sleep habits (Morrin et al, 1999). One of the suggested habits was a regular daytime nap. More specifically, it recommends a **30-minute nap in the early afternoon**. This blog will now dive deeper into some of the benefits daytime sleep can provide to older adults!

Wakefulness

On average, older adults obtain almost 2 hours less sleep than younger adults (Buysse et al., 1992). This is due to the biological changes and social factors influencing older adults and their sleep, as mentioned previously. It is generally recommended that humans obtain approximately 8 hours of sleep per night. Therefore, daytime sleep may serve as a form of “replacement”

sleep to help make up the sleep that may have been lost during the night and thus improve waking function and reduce daytime sleepiness (Murphy & Campbell, 2009).

Improved Cognitive Function

Scientists have also looked at the effects of napping on cognitive performance. It is well known that sleep is important for memory consolidation, and daytime sleep has also been shown to provide similar benefits for learning and memory retention (Cousins et al., 2019). Another study, performed with older adults aged 50 to 88 years, showed that a regular regimen of short "power naps" improved performance on neurobehavioural tasks testing for logical reasoning, math processing, and memory (Campbell et al., 2012).

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Improved Accuracy for Detecting Dementia and Other Neurological Disorders

Regular daytime sleep may also improve the diagnostic accuracy of dementia. Daytime drowsiness and naps lasting more than 2 hours are symptoms that can manifest with dementia (Falk et al, 2018). However, when evaluating these symptoms, it can be difficult to discern if prolonged daytime sleep is due to the neurological disorder or simply a lack of sleep. Intentional daytime sleep can help to minimize daytime drowsiness from lack of sleep as a confounder against the accurate diagnosis of dementia. Similarly, Alzheimer's can also cause sleep disturbances and emerging studies are showing long daytime naps as an early symptom of Alzheimer's (Oh et al., 2019).

Prevent Falls and Injuries

Excessive sleepiness can affect our control of posture and balance, and may precipitate falls and injuries (Montesinos et al., 2018). Daytime naps not only allow the us to catch up on lost sleep, but they also allow the body to rest and recuperate from other physical activities performed during the day.

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Stress Reliever

Napping can be an effective strategy for individuals to manage their stress, especially if it is exacerbated by sleep disturbances. It is important to note that stress also leads to fatigue, making sleep even more important and daytime napping an efficient way of meeting sleep-duration goals. A study showed that even 15-minute naps lowered heart rate and heart rate variability, as well as subjective ratings of fatigue and stress compared to when no naps are taken (Oriyama, Miyakoshi, & Kobayashi, 2014). Short naps have also been suggested to potentially improve cardiovascular health in people suffering from sleep difficulties.

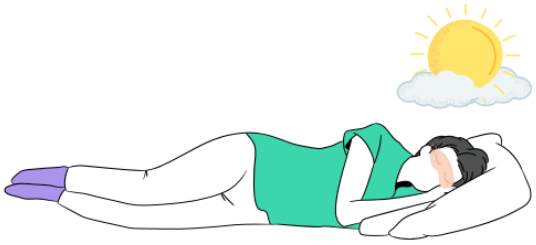
Positive Mood

In addition to reducing the irritability one may have when they do not get enough sleep, the benefits of daytime sleep such as wakefulness, improved cognitive performance, reduced stress and fatigue, can all lend to improving one's quality of life. This increases satisfaction and enhances mood. Better moods can also impact those around us, such as partners, family members and caregivers.

Important Guidelines for Daytime Napping

Hopefully, this article has helped relay some benefits of daytime sleep, and maybe even persuaded you to squeeze in a regular nap into your schedule. However, experts and those who developed the sleep hygiene concept recommend sticking to **30 minute naps in the early afternoon**. Naps that are longer than 60 minutes, or occur in the later afternoon or evening, can affect our night-time sleeping schedule and may even worsen sleep difficulties that one may be experiencing, such as difficulty falling asleep.

Fun Fact: Intentional napping, as opposed to dozing off accidentally, can help train the body to make the most of your short sleep and feel recharged and refreshed when you wake up!



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