Community Living

LAURI LEADLEY SLEEP SOUNDLY

Short naps can improve performance

Americans are known for working hard and doing whatever it takes to get the job done. Maybe that’s why the idea of taking naps makes some people feel uncomfortable.

But some pretty powerful Americans have relied on the power of naps, including John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan and John D. Rockefeller. While naps won’t make up for poor quality nighttime sleep, they can improve your performance and boost your mood.

Naps are identified in three ways: planned napping, emergency napping and habitual napping. You might plan a nap when you know you’re going to be up later than normal while an emergency nap occurs when you’re too tired to continue whatever you’re doing. Habitual napping is when you take a nap at the same time every day.

Generally, afternoon is the best time to nap, usually between 1 and 3 p.m. If you work or sleep odd hours, a nap can be most beneficial about seven hours after you wake up. There is ongoing debate over how long to sleep. In the 1990s NASA researchers determined a 26-minute nap was ideal for pilots because it improved performance by 34 percent and alertness by 54 percent.

The National Sleep Foundation recommends 20-30 minutes for short-term alertness that won’t leave you feeling groggy. How do you nap away from home? Start by finding a quiet, restful place to lie down. That will help you fall asleep faster than sitting upright.

Set an alarm, use eye shades if the room isn’t dark and earplugs if you need to block out noise. Slow down your breathing and focus on a relaxing scene.

So, the next time you need an afternoon pick me up, skip the candy or coffee and try a nap instead.

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