

Perform Better - Use Power Naps!

By Lyndsay Swinton

The case for power naps is simple. Our jobs require us to be at our mental best – we need to be alert, interpersonally effective, creative and have a good memory. Understanding your natural everyday energy peaks and troughs can help maximise your performance at work and leave an abundance of energy for your life outside of work. And all this from a short power nap!

Everyday energy peaks and troughs

Your body has many natural cycles, such as the heart beating or the daily awake/sleep cycle. The natural cycle we are interested in relates to our brain's "hemispheric dominance"; whether we are using our left or right brain more. During this cycle, we experience 90 to 120 minutes of high energy and concentration and mostly left brain activity, and then dip into a 20-minute period of low energy and inefficiency and mostly right brain activity.

You may be tempted to skip the energy dip by grabbing a coffee and pushing on, but you're denying your body its natural restorative period. So to improve our performance, we need to value this dip in energy, take power naps and leave our right brain to work its magic.

Learn To Recognise "Take a Break" Power Nap Signals

- Needing to stretch, move about, yawn or sigh
- Making careless errors in speech, writing, typing or counting
- Feeling emotionally vulnerable
- Hunger pangs
- Wandering mind and weakening concentration

Breathe Easy!

Alternatively, you could try the nostril test. Sounds crazy, but it works! Close one nostril with a finger and breathe through the open nostril. Repeat with the other nostril, and notice which nostril was easier to breathe through. If your right nostril was clearer, then your "left brain" is dominant or if your left nostril was clearer, your "right brain" is dominant and you should be taking a power nap.

Power naps and other energy boosters

When your energy starts to wane, take a break and;

- Find somewhere quiet, close your eyes and use your favourite relaxation technique. Maybe drift back to a favourite holiday, or listen to some calming music.
- Have a light snack, about 200 – 300 calories will do.
- Gaze out of a window and day dream for 5-10 minutes. This has the added benefit of giving your eyes a rest from a computer screen.
- Stretch, walk around and maybe massage your neck or do some sitting exercises.

If you're not able to get away, the next best thing is to change tasks and the pace at which you are working;

- Organise your things to do for tomorrow
- Doodle on a note pad
- Let voicemail take your calls
- Do filing, tidy your desk and clear out clutter

You're doing something whilst doing nothing

The key to improving your energy is to make sure you avoid doing anything difficult, strongly goal oriented or requiring concentration during the time out. In short, anything that engages your left-brain. If such meandering scares you, remember how often you come up with something creative or a problem falls into perspective when you're doing "nothing".

Consequences of missed power naps

Your body is well able, and probably practiced, at over-riding this natural cycle. Be aware though of the consequences long term;

- Your ability to read, write, think listen or even speak is impaired
- You make silly judgement errors, despite knowing better
- You make interpersonal mistakes and maybe flashes of irritation and impatience
- Your immune system may become suppressed due to continually elevated levels of stress hormones
- Nearly forgot.....your memory starts failing you :>)

This may lead to feelings of incompetence, loss of self-confidence, thinking you are weak or lazy, and being generally fed-up as nothing seems to go right. In reality it's

simple – you've simply run out of mental energy. In the extreme, individuals who ignore power nap signals leave themselves open to problems with sleep, digestion, their heart and shortened life span!

So, to make sure you stay energetic, healthy and productive, become aware of your body's needs for power naps cycle and take a break!

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