Napping

UNC Student naps in a pile of autumn leaves. Image by Dan Sears, UNC Chapel Hill

Naps can help you be more productive, when you know how and when to take naps to maximize their benefit.

When Naps Help and When Naps Hurt

Naps can be beneficial if you are sleep deprived, if you know that you will be awake later than usual, or if they are a regular part of your sleep cycle. When you take naps too late in the day, however, they can interrupt your regular sleep cycle and make it harder to sleep at night, creating a cycle of sleepiness. Avoid taking naps for longer than 20 minutes. Doing so can lead to sleep inertia, the feeling of grogginess that you get when awaking from a deep sleep.

Planning your Nap

Good naps don’t just happen! First find a quiet place where you can lie down (and do lie down if you can? it takes much longer to fall asleep while sitting). If noise is a problem, wear headphones or ear plugs. Figure out how long you want to nap, and set an alarm. Naps come in two recommended lengths, a 20-45 minute nap, also known as a power nap, and a 90-120 minute nap. If you sleep between 45-90 minutes you may actually wake up feeling goggier, since you’re waking up from the deepest part of your sleep.

Lay back and enjoy your rest!

Photo by Dan Sears, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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