



Newsweek

Follow

How Your Afternoon Naps Can Affect Your Lifespan

Story by Maria Azzurra Volpe

• 7mo • 4 min read



Stock image of a woman napping on the couch. Doctors explain how naps can affect your lifespan. © Getty Images

Nothing feels quite as good as waking up from a regenerating power nap in the afternoon, but we've all at least once experienced the kind of nap that leaves us disoriented and even more tired than we were before dozing off.

History's most famous power-nappers are said to range from Leonardo da Vinci and Albert Einstein to Winston Churchill and President John F. Kennedy.

Studies [show that napping](#) can improve your well-being if done right. However, napping too hard can end up having a negative impact on your overall health, and may also contribute to shortening your lifespan.

Newsweek has spoken to sleep doctors to understand how [afternoon naps](#) can affect your life, and how you can make the most out of them.

How Taking Short Naps Affects You

Chelsie Rohrscheib, Ph.D., head sleep expert and neuroscientist at sleep testing firm Wesper, told *Newsweek* that while research is mixed on how [napping impacts health](#) and longevity, studies suggest that how napping affects your health depends on the situation.

She said: "People who [are] generally healthy and have good quality sleep at night tend to benefit from short naps during the day. [Evidence shows that] these individuals have improved brain and cardiac health, and may live longer."

Power naps, around 10-20 minutes long, can improve cognitive function, mood, and productivity, and provide an energy boost. According to Web MD, short naps can be better than caffeine when you need to concentrate but are feeling too tired.

Moreover, they help reduce stress, improve your immune health, lower blood pressure after going through mental stress, and help your body recover from pressure-filled situations. They also help boost your creativity as well as regulate your night sleep.

According to Dr. Raj Dasgupta, chief medical adviser for Sleep Advisor, it's important that naps don't exceed 30 minutes to prevent you from entering the deeper stages of sleep. He argues that naps longer than 30 minutes put you at risk of experiencing sleep inertia, which is when you wake up from deep sleep feeling more tired and groggy than before your nap.

He told *Newsweek*: "Napping for too long or too late in the day can interfere with your nighttime sleep and can be a sign of an underlying sleep or medical condition."

How Taking Long Naps Affects You

Rohrscheib explains that long napping can be associated with poor health and a reduced lifespan because people who consistently take long naps are likely getting low-quality sleep or short sleep durations at night.

She said: "Poor sleep at night is well understood to have major negative effects on health and lifespan. In particular, we see increased rates of most types of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, obesity, neurodegenerative conditions, hormonal issues, and immune system dysfunction. Bad sleep compounds over time, and naps can only do such much.

"Additionally, we also see high rates of sleep disorders, like sleep apnea, in people who require long naps during the day. Sleep apnea in particular is extremely common and increases your risk for various chronic health conditions and early death. Another consideration is that people who need long naps are generally pretty tired and sluggish during the day, and therefore more likely to have a sedentary lifestyle."

Moreover, long naps increase the risk of sleep inertia, affect our ability to fall asleep at night, and may increase insomnia, which perpetuates the need for more long naps during the day.

According to Dasgupta, needing long naps often may also be a sign that something is wrong with your body.

"If you find yourself needing long or multiple naps to get through the day, you might have an underlying sleep disorder or health condition. If you're getting quality restorative sleep at night, you likely don't need to nap—so if you find yourself needing long naps routinely, it could be a sign that something else is going on," he said.

How Taking Naps Affects Children

While adults mostly just nap when they feel tired or stressed, children actually need naps to grow. That is because small children need more sleep hours than adults, a need that will decrease as they age, explained Dasgupta.

"Children require more sleep compared to adults and benefit significantly from naps, as naps aid their cognitive development, memory consolidation, and emotional regulation. Also, naps can enhance children's mood, energy, and overall well-being.

"Adults don't need as frequent naps as children, but they can still experience benefits from an occasional power nap—such as improved alertness, productivity, reduced stress, and mood. It's important for adults to limit the length of their naps and be mindful of timing to avoid disrupting their nighttime sleep."

How to Make the Most of Your Naps

According to Dasgupta, if you are feeling tired and have the opportunity to take a short nap in the early afternoon, then napping can be a beneficial way to improve your alertness and productivity, although he warns against getting into the habit of taking naps routinely.

"Napping around the same time consistently can cause your body to become used to the naps during the day. If you're getting good sleep at night and feel alert during the day, you most likely do not need to nap. If you have difficulty sleeping at night then napping may not be a good idea," he added.

