

# *In Touch*

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## HAVE A NAP

Recent research on napping suggests that an afternoon nap as short as 10 minutes or as long as 90 minutes can enhance alertness, mood, memory and mental performance. According to the US National Sleep Foundation, 31% of the population sleep less than 7 hours at night. Healthy adults have a basic sleep need of 8 hours every night to function efficiently.

In 2007 Greek researchers reported that people who took regular naps (defined as at least 3 naps a week for at least 30 minutes) had a 37% lower coronary mortality than those who did not nap. The study involved over 23,000 Greek individuals with no history of heart disease, stroke or cancer. They followed the participants for an average of 6.3 years.

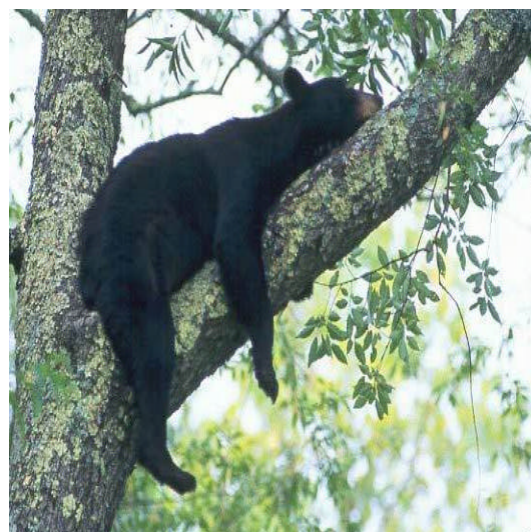
NASA researchers report that a 26 minute nap can increase performance by as much as 34%.

A 2008 University of Manitoba Faculty of Nursing study has found that “a number of personal health, safety and patient care issues can arise when most critical care nurses who work the night shift are unable to take a nap”. The study concluded that “it is to the betterment of nurses and their patients to take a restorative nap”.

In a recent book, Sara Mednick, Ph.D., a research psychologist at the Salk Institute in California reported that her studies showed that “without a midday rest, performance falls apart across the day. Napping maintains and even boosts your skills, from creative problem solving, alertness and physical stamina, to mood and memory”. She says the best time to nap is about 8 hours after you wake up. She stated that human beings are creatures of habit and a having regular routine, with respect to sleep, is beneficial. In a study she conducted with 40 volunteers at a Manhattan publishing house she found that nappers take less time to fall asleep, have an increased ability to sleep through the night, felt more refreshed, and decreased their daytime sleepiness by 10%. It was 38% less likely that sleepiness interfered with their daytime activities and they experienced increased alertness, stamina and mental acuity. Dr. Mednick takes a 45 minute nap every day, as do I, and advises at least 20 minute naps. If you have time and need it, up to 60 minutes is helpful.

I realize that it may be very difficult for many people to take a mid afternoon nap due to work constraints but more and more employers are coming to an understanding that the benefits of napping may far outweigh the time lost.

The optimum nap experience would involve a dark and quiet room (covering the eyes with an eye-shade, wearing earplugs if necessary), setting an alarm and establishing a firm schedule.



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## SLEEP

**The Mattress:** Lancet, a United Kingdom medical journal, recently reported that researchers in Spain monitored 313 adults who reported back pain when lying in bed and on rising. They were all given mattresses with varying degrees of firmness. After 90 days, subjects with medium-firm mattresses had significantly less pain than those with firm ones.



**The Pillow:** I always advise my clients to sleep in a side lying position, as I think this is the optimum sleep position.

Back sleeping is not a bad position as long as the neck is supported in a neutral position and you do not have a snoring problem. Lying on one's stomach is detrimental because the neck is radically rotated and prone sleeping is a position that is not conducive to proper biomechanical efficiency. Having said that, one could sleep in this position and get away with it if one could arrange the pillows so

***“The idea is to have your head and neck supported so that they are in line with your spine.”***

that the neck was not extremely rotated, but I advise against it. In side lying you will usually require two pillows to allow the neck to be in that neutral position. You may have to experiment with various combinations of pillows to get it right. The idea is to have the head and neck supported so that they are in line with your spine. The pillow support should be such that the shoulder is not compressed too much. Although some degree of compression will be inevitable, do your best to minimize it. Try to make sure your body is in that neutral position as much as possible within the limitations of a sleeping posture. A pillow between the knees is a good idea. If necessary stuff two pillows in a pillow slip. This will keep the spine straight, and to some degree, keep you from rolling into the prone position if that is your tendency. I do not

believe it is necessary to spend hundreds of dollars on fancy pillows. The big department stores have a large selection of ordinary pillows which cost no more than \$20 or \$30 each.

**The Physiology of Melatonin:** Melatonin is a hormone produced in the human by the pineal gland, a gland located in the cerebrum. There is some evidence that endogenous melatonin (the natural melatonin produced by your body) stabilizes and strengthens coupling of circadian rhythms, especially of core temperature and sleep-wake rhythms. Melatonin production seems to increase with low light levels which assists the sleep process. The presence of light will inhibit and even stop melatonin production. During the day melatonin levels remain low, as light shuts down the pineal gland's production of melatonin. As night falls, melatonin production rises. At an individual's habitual bedtime the pineal gland significantly increases production of melatonin and the body sleeps. As the day dawns and light becomes stronger, plasma levels of melatonin decrease over time, the body gradually wakes up. A dark environment may increase the production of melatonin and facilitate a beneficial sleep. It is important to note that this process is very complex and many factors to do with sleep have not yet been identified.

## MEDITATION

Meditation is simply a way to relax, to consciously relax. One study found that meditation before bedtime increased melatonin levels for that night. No increases in blood melatonin levels were noted on nights where participants didn't meditate. Meditation can improve concentration and creativity, contribute to better mental and physical health and allow you to worry less about small problems which have been magnified by your mind. Attaining a state of serenity is actually easier than you might imagine. I have been meditating for 6 years now. If I can do it, so can you.

A simple way to meditate is to sit in a chair with your feet hip width apart, your back straight, your chin parallel to the floor. Place your hands, palms up, comfortably on your thighs. Close your eyes and relax all the muscles in your body. Disregard your thoughts of the day. Breathe normally counting to a comfortable number (like 5 or 10) on inhalations and exhalations. Go through 5 to 10 cycles of this breathing and then proceed to breathe normally. As thoughts come, treat them as "clouds passing by". Strive to be present and concentrate on your breathing. Begin with 10 minute sessions to gain experience then extend the sessions to 20 or 30 minutes. When you have finished meditating, gradually become aware of where you are and get up slowly.

Meditation cannot help but to have one focus on feelings like empathy, kindness, compassion etc. Practice daily to get cumulative benefits. It's like any discipline, the more you practice, the more proficient you become. If you do not have a lot of time even a 5 minute meditation can be beneficial. The best times to meditate are in the early morning and or just before you go to bed. I try to meditate twice a day but I prefer the early morning as there is more silence at that time. Many people who meditate come to a point where it seemingly does not fit into the picture anymore. This is the point where many people quit meditating. If you can persevere you may attain a deeper understanding of your inner self and gain a better understanding of your life's purpose.



The information in this newsletter has been carefully reviewed for accuracy and is intended for general information only. The body of knowledge is constantly changing and this newsletter cannot reflect all changes. For specific questions and problems I encourage you to see a physician in your area. I hope this newsletter is informative and I welcome your feedback.

**GIVE THE GIFT OF TOUCH:**  
Give the gift of relaxation, tranquility and wellness. Treat your loved ones, friends, employees or coworkers to a gift they will enjoy and appreciate. A gift certificate for massage is a gift that no one returns and everyone remembers. Call me at the clinic or e-mail me anytime.

For your convenience,  
I now accept Debit, Visa and  
Master Card



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