The Power of Napping: What the Research Actually Shows

Name Date Class

Reading

1 Around two or three o'clock in the afternoon, many people hit a **slump**. Your eyes feel heavy, your concentration fades, and a second coffee does not seem to help. In busy, achievement-focused cultures, people are often told to push through with caffeine and **willpower**. Sleep research suggests that a short nap may work better, but the details matter, and not every popular claim about napping holds up.

2 How long you sleep makes a big difference. In a 2006 experiment at Flinders University in Australia, 24 healthy young adults, **sleep-deprived** after sleeping only five hours the night before, took naps of different lengths. A 10-minute nap improved **alertness**, the state of being awake and ready to react, almost immediately, and some benefits lasted about two and a half hours. A 20-minute nap also helped, but the improvement took about 35 minutes to appear. After a 30-minute nap, people first showed **impaired** performance and only improved later. The explanation is **sleep inertia**: waking up from deeper sleep can leave you **groggy** and confused. A short nap of 20 minutes or less is often called a **power nap**. Researchers still debate the ideal length.

3 Some of the best-known evidence comes from aviation. In a NASA study of long-haul flights, 12 crew members took a planned 40-minute rest during the quiet cruise phase, while nine others kept working as a **control group**. The crew who rested fell asleep in about six minutes and slept for about 26 minutes on average. They showed better alertness and performance than the control group, including during descent and landing. The lead author, Mark Rosekind, has reported gains of 34 percent in performance and 54 percent in alertness, though some accounts give a higher figure for alertness. The groups were small and the setting was unusual, so the results are no promise for a student or an office worker.

4 Napping may also help learning. In a much-cited experiment led by Sara Mednick at Harvard, volunteers practiced a visual task and were tested again later. Those who took a nap of 60 to 90 minutes improved by about as much as people normally do after a full night of sleep. Researchers think sleep helps the brain **consolidate** new learning, which means turning fragile new memories into stronger, longer-lasting ones. Some studies report similar benefits for memorizing facts, so a nap after studying may help you **recall** the material later. But this result comes from one specific visual task, and the naps that worked included both deep sleep and dreaming sleep, so it does not show that a nap can replace a night of sleep.

5 Napping is also a cultural question. A midday rest, the siesta, has long been part of daily life in parts of the Mediterranean and Latin America. In Greece, researchers followed nearly 24,000 adults with no history of heart disease, stroke, or cancer. Over about six years, those who napped for at least 30 minutes three or more times a week had a 37 percent lower risk of dying from heart disease. That is an **association**, not proof: the study only observed people's habits, and its authors said more studies were needed. In Japan, sleeping in meetings or on trains, called inemuri, or “sleeping while present,” is often **tolerated**, and it can even suggest dedication, because it implies you worked yourself to exhaustion. The scholar Brigitte Steger says unwritten rules apply: senior workers have more freedom, and you must still look present.

6 Guidance also changes. The Mayo Clinic's current advice calls a 20- to 30-minute nap ideal for healthy adults, but an earlier version said 10 to 20 minutes. It lists **drawbacks**, including grogginess and, for people who already have **insomnia**, possible trouble sleeping at night. It suggests napping in the early afternoon, because a nap after about three o'clock can make it harder to sleep soundly. It also notes that some research links naps longer than an hour a day with higher risks of high blood pressure, diabetes, and heart disease. The Greek study, the NASA trial, and the Flinders experiment involved different people in different situations, so none of them shows what a 20-minute nap at two o'clock would do for you.

Vocabulary Matching

Match each word from the reading with its meaning. Write the letter on the line.

1	**slump**	_____	**A**	the mental strength to make yourself do something
2	**willpower**	_____	**B**	allowed, even if not fully approved of
3	**sleep-deprived**	_____	**C**	a long-term problem falling or staying asleep
4	**alertness**	_____	**D**	the group in a study that gets no treatment
5	**impaired**	_____	**E**	a short sleep taken to restore energy quickly
6	**sleep inertia**	_____	**F**	disadvantages or problems with something
7	**groggy**	_____	**G**	made weaker or worse in quality
8	**power nap**	_____	**H**	tired because you have not slept enough
9	**control group**	_____	**I**	weak and only half awake
10	**consolidate**	_____	**J**	to bring something back from your memory
11	**recall**	_____	**K**	a link between two things, without proof of cause
12	**association**	_____	**L**	the state of being awake and ready to react
13	**tolerated**	_____	**M**	a period of slow thinking after waking from deep sleep
14	**insomnia**	_____	**N**	a period of low energy or poor performance
15	**drawbacks**	_____	**O**	to make new memories stronger and longer lasting

Fill in the Blank

Choose a word from the box to complete each sentence. Use each word once. The words are already in the correct form.

alertness	**association**	**consolidate**	**control group**	**drawbacks**	**groggy**	**impaired**	**insomnia**
power nap	**recall**	**sleep-deprived**	**slump**	**tolerated**	**willpower**		

1 Many people hit an afternoon _____ around three o'clock.

2 It takes _____ to keep studying when you are tired.

3 The _____ students found it hard to concentrate.

4 A short nap can improve _____ almost immediately.

5 Alcohol can leave a driver's judgment _____ .

6 After waking from deep sleep, you may feel _____ and confused.

7 A short nap of 20 minutes or less is often called a _____ .

8 The _____ did not receive the new medicine.

9 Sleep may help the brain _____ new memories.

10 A nap after studying may help you _____ the material later.

11 The study found an _____ between naps and lower heart risk.

12 Sleeping in meetings is sometimes _____ in Japan.

13 People with _____ have trouble falling or staying asleep.

14 One of the _____ of napping is feeling groggy afterward.

Comprehension Questions

Answer in your notebook or discuss with a partner. Questions 10 to 12 are IELTS-style.

1 According to the reading, what often happens to people around two or three o'clock in the afternoon?

2 In the Flinders University experiment, what happened after the 30-minute nap?

3 What is sleep inertia, and why does it matter when people think about how long to nap?

4 How did the NASA researchers test the effect of napping? Explain what the crew and the control group did.

5 Why does the writer say the NASA results should be treated with care?

6 What did Sara Mednick's experiment find, and what are two limits of that result?

7 What does the writer mean by saying the Greek study shows "an association, not proof"?

8 How is inemuri seen in Japan, and what unwritten rules does the reading mention?

9 The writer says that guidance also changes. What evidence does the reading give, and why does it matter for readers?

IELTS-Style Questions

10 **True, False, or Not Given:** *"In the Flinders experiment, a 30-minute nap gave an immediate improvement."* Explain your answer using evidence from the reading.

11 **Yes, No, or Not Given:** *"The writer believes that napping is harmful for most people."* Explain your answer using evidence from the reading.

12 **Author's purpose:** Why does the writer end by listing the Greek study, the NASA trial, and the Flinders experiment together? Is the aim to prove that naps work, to show the limits of each study, or something else?

True or False

Circle T (true) or F (false) according to the reading. Write a correction for each false statement on the dotted line.

1 **T / F** The writer says a second cup of coffee usually fixes the afternoon slump.

2 **T / F** In the Flinders experiment, the volunteers had slept only five hours the night before.

3 **T / F** The 30-minute nap produced an immediate improvement in performance.

4 **T / F** Sleep inertia is linked to waking up from deeper sleep.

5 **T / F** In the NASA study, the control group took a planned rest.

6 **T / F** The writer says the groups in the NASA study were small.

7 **T / F** Volunteers who napped for 60 to 90 minutes improved about as much as after a full night's sleep.

8 **T / F** The reading says Mednick's result proves that a nap can replace a night of sleep.

9 **T / F** The Greek study proved that napping prevents heart disease.

10 **T / F** The Mayo Clinic's advice on nap length has changed over time.

Discussion Questions

Talk with a partner or in a small group. The questions move from personal to more abstract.

1 Do you ever take naps? If yes, how do you usually feel afterward? If not, why not?

2 Do you get an afternoon slump? What do you usually do about it?

3 What is the strangest or most uncomfortable place where you have ever fallen asleep?

4 In your country, is it normal to nap at school, at work, or on public transport? How do other people react?

5 Imagine your school or workplace had a quiet room for naps. Would you use it? What might the benefits and drawbacks be?

6 In Japan, looking tired can suggest that someone has worked hard. Do you think that is fair? Does it happen where you live?

7 Have you ever made a mistake because you were tired? What happened, and what would you do differently?

8 Do you think resting and sleeping are the same thing? Can you rest without sleeping, and is that enough?

9 The reading says the ideal nap length is still debated. When you get conflicting health advice, how do you decide what to believe?

10 The Greek study shows an association, not proof. Can you think of another everyday habit that is linked to good health but might not cause it?

11 Many students stay up late to study or to socialize. Do you think this is healthy, and what could change it?

12 In some places, shops and offices close for a long midday break. Would that be realistic where you live? Who might gain, and who might lose?

13 Should sleep be taught as a health skill in schools, like nutrition or exercise? Why or why not?

14 If you could design your ideal daily schedule with time for rest built in, what would it look like, and what would stop you from following it?

Language Focus: Reporting Verbs

Reporting verbs introduce what a study, an expert, or an organization found or said. The verb you choose also shows how certain the writer is.

In the reading:

- "Sleep research **suggests** that a short nap may work better…"
- "The lead author, Mark Rosekind, has **reported** gains of 34 percent in performance…"
- "It also **notes** that some research links naps longer than an hour a day with higher risks…"

Practice: Rewrite this sentence so that it names a source and uses a reporting verb: *"Naps improve learning."*

Activities and speed challenge
englishbridges.com/lessons/power-of-napping

Notes