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WHAT'S THIS?

UPFRONT - APRIL/MAY 2008

YOU SNOOZE, YOU WIN

RECENT RESEARCH REVEALS MAKING TIME FOR AN AFTERNOON NAP
MAY BOOST YOUR BOTTOM LINE

by Shannon McRae

Sarah Fitzharding's work is hectic. When she's not traveling across the country for her marketing-research consulting business, she's dashing around her home base of New York City to various client meetings. Despite her harried schedule, Fitzharding rarely misses her afternoon nap.

"The difference it makes is startling," says the owner of [Galileo Research and Strategy Consultancy](#). "Taking a nap enables me to feel alert and sharp well into the evening, but in a controlled, balanced way—not the wired feeling you get from coffee."

Catching some shut-eye during the lull after lunch sounds appealing. But finding the time to actually rest sounds impossible to most small business owners.

"We're a very sleep-deprived culture, yet there is still a sense that napping is weird," says Dr. Sara Mednick, a researcher at the Salk Institute for Biological Studies in San Diego and author of *Take a Nap! Change Your Life* (Workman Publishing, 2006). Through years of research, Mednick has proved what most of us already know—that without a nap, it's harder to be as alert in the late afternoon as you are in the morning.

The decreased alertness not only makes it more difficult for you and your employees to concentrate, it can also drain your bottom line. According to a poll by the National Sleep Foundation, half of American employees report that sleepiness on the job interferes with the amount of work they get done.

The potential loss of productivity is one reason more companies are waking up to the idea of napping at work. "Industries like biotech and dot-coms are pushing their employees to stay later, work harder and be more productive," Mednick says. "Napping is part of being more productive."

In addition to the cognitive boost, napping brings multiple health benefits, too. "People who nap more often have a decreased risk for coronary heart disease, are less stressed and are more perceptive," Mednick says.

Fitzharding appreciates being able to nap daily thanks to the control she has over her schedule as a small business owner. "I feel lucky that the work I do allows me to accommodate what feels like a delicious indulgence," she says. "But more importantly, it is about making a choice, and knowing that even though it's tough to give up those 30 minutes, I will more than recoup them in renewed efficiency and alertness afterwards."

Sleep Tight

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If you're ready to start incorporating naps into your daily routine, consider these tips from Dr. Sara Mednick to get the most out of your shut-eye time:

Schedule your nap. Just like everything else in your busy schedule, naps won't happen if you don't plan for them. Carve out some time in the afternoon—even if it's just a few minutes. Close your door, turn off your computer monitor and forward your phone to voice mail.

Be patient. "Napping is a learned skill," Mednick says. Don't get discouraged if you spend your first few napping sessions counting sheep. Keep trying and soon you'll be a pro at resting peacefully.

Prepare for your environment. Some people can sit at their desk and lay back, while others need to stretch out on the floor. Find what's comfortable for you. Bring a pillow, eye mask or earplugs to the office if it helps cut down on light and noise sensitivity.

Seize the moment. Too busy to take a break at the office? Search for downtimes during the day when you can squeeze in some rest. Mednick tries to arrive early for meetings so she can nap in her car for a few minutes beforehand.

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Ready to unwind? Find more ways to chill out in "Stress Management" in the "Growth and Planning" section of www.NFIB.com/toolsandtips.