

NEW YORK POST

SCIENTIST: DON'T WORRY, BE NAPPY

By KATHERINE PUSHKAR

December 19, 2006 -- IT'S safe to say that the nap does not have a stellar reputation. After all, who naps? Children, old people, George Costanza.

When the "Seinfeld" character customized a dozing zone underneath his desk, he was the personification of laziness and indolence.

But sleep scientist Sara Mednick is trying to awaken the public to a more positive perception of the daytime rest-break

In her new book "Take a Nap! Change Your Life" (Workman, \$12.95), she explains how regular napping can

- * Alleviate stress
- * Boost creativity
- * Strengthen memory.

Naps, she contends, can also reduce the risk of heart attack, stroke and diabetes, increase productivity, improve your mood, save you money, make you look younger, help you lose weight and even pump up your sex life.

"I nap under my desk regularly," she boasts over the phone from her Salk Institute office in (where else?) California.

The premise is that a person can recharge with as little as a 10-minute snooze during the day by strategically scheduling naps according to one's sleep cycle.

A sleep cycle lasts for about 90 to 100 minutes. After a brief Stage 1, unconsciousness begins at Stage 2; Stages 3 and 4 are deeper slumber, known as slow-wave sleep (SWS); and Stage 5 is rapid eye movement or REM sleep, when your heart rate speeds up, body temperature drops and the namesake eye-darting occurs.

In her studies, Mednick found that Stage 2 sleep increases alertness and motor function skills, SWS sleep improves memory and motor skills, REM sleep inspires creativity.

When we're awake, our brains are still going through sleep cycles - shadow sleep cycles - and SWS and REM shadow cycles wax and wane throughout the day. A surgeon can time a nap to be higher in SWS, whereas an actor might want to nod off with more REM.

Before Mednick's work, sleep research focused mostly on sleep deprivation - 50 million Americans suffer from it reports the National Sleep Foundation, resulting in \$150 billion a year in lost productivity and accidents, according to a Cornell study.

Mednick saw the problem, but approached it in a different way.

"I thought, trying to get people to work less is a losing battle," she recalls.

True enough. But getting businesses to encourage people to sleep on the job is not exactly an easy sell.

Mednick agrees. "Someone has to do a PowerPoint presentation on why napping is a positive, viable business solution, but I do believe in time it will happen."

To that end, her book includes a questionnaire to determine your sleep profile, tips on how to relax and overcome cognitive nap aversion (no, seriously - she calls it CNA), and the truth about nap myths.

So, if you find yourself exercising your inner George Costanza at the office, just explain to your boss that research says napping will make you a better employee.

katherine.pushkar@nypost.com

Home

NEW YORK POST is a registered trademark of NYP Holdings, Inc. NYPOST.COM, NYPOSTONLINE.COM, and NEWYORKPOST.COM are trademarks of NYP Holdings, Inc.

Copyright 2006 NYP Holdings, Inc. All rights reserved.