Strategic Napping Protocol

Evidence-based guidelines for nap timing, duration, and recovery

THE SCIENCE IN 60 SECONDS

- Naps exploit the natural post-lunch circadian dip (13:00–15:00) when alertness drops regardless of sleep the night before.
- A 2008 study in Nature Neuroscience found a 90-min nap restored perceptual learning to morning-fresh levels — equivalent to a fu
- Stage 2 NREM sleep (dominant in 20-min naps) boosts motor memory and procedural skill via sleep spindles.
- Short naps (<30 min) increase norepinephrine, serotonin, and acetylcholine — all linked to alertness and working memory.
- Naps >30 min risk sleep inertia: grogginess from waking during slow-wave sleep. Timing the exit matters.

CHOOSE YOUR NAP TYPE

10-min Nap
: Stage 1–2 only. Immediate alertness boost with zero sleep inertia. Best before a meeting or creative task.

20-min Nap (Power Nap)
: Full Stage 2. Optimal for cognitive performance and motor skill. Standard recommendation for most adults.

Coffee Nap
: 20-min nap taken immediately after 200mg caffeine. Caffeine clears adenosine just as you wake. Outperforms both alone (Loughborough Univ., 1997).

90-min Nap
: Full sleep cycle. Reaches REM and SWS. Restores emotional memory processing. Requires adequate overnight buffer (finish by 15:00).

PRE-NAP CHECKLIST

- [ ] Schedule within 13:00–15:00 window
  Later naps suppress nighttime sleep pressure
- [ ] Set a timer (20 or 90 min — nothing between)
  The 30–60 min range maximises inertia risk
- [ ] Darken the room or use a sleep mask
  Even low light delays sleep onset by ~10 min
- [ ] Use earplugs or white noise if environment is noisy
  Acoustic interruption extends onset time
- [ ] Lie horizontal if possible
  Supine position enters sleep ~50% faster than seated
- [ ] Avoid screens for 5 min before
  Blue light spikes alertness via ipRGC photoreceptors

POST-NAP RECOVERY (if groggy)

- [ ] Get bright light immediately — step outside or face a window
- [ ] Splash cold water on face
- [ ] Move: 2 min of walking or light stretching activates the noradrenergic system
- [ ] Wait 10–15 min before high-stakes cognitive work

WHEN NOT TO NAP

Chronic insomnia: daytime naps reduce sleep pressure and worsen nighttime sleep onset.
After 15:00 for most adults (circadian phase disruption).
If total nighttime sleep exceeds 9 hours consistently — excess sleep may indicate other issues.