

# fyi

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GET A **HANDLE** ON IT



take-a-break

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THE TRUE POWER OF

# NAPS

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WRITTEN BY MALKA WINNER

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**A**bbey Fein\* was shocked to discover that she was not having a heart attack. Although she was only 33 years old, she was sure that the shooting pain in her arm, her tight chest, shortness of breath, and the overall feeling that she was dying, were surely enough signs of a coronary incident to warrant calling an ambulance. But when she was repeatedly asked if everything was okay at home and if she was undergoing any really stressful life circumstances, she was forced to acknowledge that what she had experienced was a classic anxiety attack.

Although not dangerous, it had certainly been terrifying. Abby knew she had to get to the bottom of whatever was causing her anxiety, and to also figure out how to better cope with it -- or she would be faced with more attacks. When she tried to pinpoint roots, she was stumped. Life was stressful, but nothing was traumatic. Then she heard that a lack of sleep can actually lead to anxiety -- and something clicked.

Abby, a mother of five young children, was running her freelance graphics business from home and living far from family. She had little cleaning or babysitting help, was a hopeless perfectionist, and was still nursing her baby at night. She usually got just five (or fewer!) hours of sleep a night. Abby realized something would have to change; she couldn't carry on like this, and she never wanted to experience an anxiety attack again.

Working with a psychologist, Abby decided her first project to tackle was sleep. When she put her little

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ones down for a nap, she was going to put herself down, too. She was surprised to discover that "taking a little nap" wasn't as simple as it sounded.

#### WHY NAP?

Lack of sleep has been connected to a whole smorgasbord of problems, including Alzheimer's, anxiety, cancer, car accidents, depression, diabetes, heart disease, high blood pressure, hormonal imbalance, irritability, low productivity, obesity, risk-taking, stress, and more. But you don't have to reach a breaking point (like Abby did) to reap the benefits of more sleep. The problem is prioritizing that precious slumber.

Rena Reiser, a health and wellness coach, and the brains behind [towardsahealthybalance.com](http://towardsahealthybalance.com), notes that when it comes to self-care, "so many women don't take adequate care of themselves, because they think they have so much to do, and so they put themselves last." Sleep, she points out, "is the 'easiest' thing to push off, because as long as we are awake, we can keep crossing things off of our to-do lists." But as

we know all too well, she says, "A woman's work is never done. There's always another thing to do, another thing to accomplish."

In a similar vein, Samantha Rodman, a clinical psychologist and author in Maryland, has noted the irony in how most parents "place their child's sleep schedule very high on their priority list, and can discuss in depth the ways that their kid's behavior is impacted by lack of sleep" and yet place their own sleep on the bottom of the list. "It's a myth," she writes, "that adults can deal with sleep deprivation better than kids." We may not be having tantrums, but we need to catch our zzz's, too.

Getting a good night's sleep can contribute to our well-being in many ways, but even a quick nap can have tremendous benefits, aside from the obvious energizing ones. Here are a few:

- An afternoon nap of just 20-30 minutes has been shown to lower levels of cortisol (the stress hormone) and decrease a person's anxiety and depression levels.

## GET A HANDLE ON IT

- Naps help improve brain function, including memory and decision-making, concentration, creativity, and productivity. Some researchers recommend napping after learning something new, saying you'll be better at it when you wake up.
- Sleep decreases inflammation and chronic pain, promoting the repair of blood vessels and body tissue.
- Sleep improves hormonal balance, helps regulate insulin and blood sugar, and contributes to healthier eating.

### CATCHING THE WINKS

"Life is about finding a balance," says Rena Reiser. "By setting boundaries around sleep, when we do accomplish our goals, we do them so much more effectively -- and we feel better about what we've accomplished, which is probably the most important part. The best baby steps a woman can take to work on her sleep are to set a goal for when she wants to go to bed, and look at her task list and do the things that are important for the here and now," she advises.

Sleep is really powerful. It can mean the difference between feeling great and losing patience with our families and ourselves. How apropos, then, that a quick afternoon snooze has been termed the "power nap." It really is a powerful rejuvenator (scientifically proven to be even better than coffee). **fyi**

*\*Name and some details have been changed.*

## 12 TIPS TO HELP MAXIMIZE YOUR NAP



**1. Be consistent.**  
Nap around the same time each day.

**2. Breathe deeply.** Deep breathing will calm you, helping you fall asleep.



**4. Exercise in the a.m.**  
A morning walk, yoga routine, or exercise class will help you sleep better later.



**3. Darkness.**  
Turn off lights and pull down shades.



**5. Expel the cell.** Keep electronic devices far away while you're trying to nap. There will always be another call, text, or e-mail vying for your attention.

**6. Get over the guilt!** Don't let anyone (including you) call you lazy or insist that you need to get things done.



**8. Lie down.**  
No trying to nap in a chair!



**7. Keep rooms** at 60-67 degrees Fahrenheit.



**9. Set an alarm** to prevent you from worrying about when to wake up.



**10. Time it right.** Napping sometime between 2-3 p.m. will give you an energy boost to help you make it through the rest of the day without affecting your night. Twenty minutes is the ideal nap length to energize you without leaving you drowsy.



**12. White noise.** Block out distractions with a white-noise machine, fan or soft music.

**11. Use props,** like your favorite blanket or coziest fuzzy socks.