

Script – Print - Giving a Nod to Nodding Off

New study encourages an occasional nap to improve heart health

Remember "nap time"? It's probably been a while. Those carefree days, most likely in kindergarten, when you would grab your blanket and take a quick mid-afternoon snooze.

Well, now a new study suggests it might be a habit many of us should get back to.

Published in the journal "Heart", researchers found that adults who took one or two daytime naps per week had a lower risk of heart problems.

A stronger heart is good and we could all use more sleep, but is an occasional nap the answer? Bridget Penwell, RN, an outpatient cardiac rehab nurse at OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center, says it can't hurt. She incorporates relaxation methods with her patients.

"And one of the things we go over with them is mental imagery and deep breathing," says Bridget Penwell, RN, an outpatient cardiac rehab nurse at OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center. "So we do that every time we have a class. The first thing I do is just shut the lights off. I have everyone close their eyes and take a deep breath in with their nose and out through their mouth. Picture themselves in a happy place - whether it's on a beach, wherever. And we take about two to three minutes to do this. And then we discuss what goes on with their body. It can lower your stress hormones, your blood pressure can decrease, your heart rate can decrease. And that's just from a one to two to three minute break."

For any number of reasons Penwell points out that many of us are living increasingly stressful lives. So, whatever you can do to reduce that level of anxiety - whether it be a chance to relax, rest, or even exercise, can be a benefit to your health.

And we're not alone. Penwell points to what is already being done in Japan.

"They are letting people during the midday at their work, in their office - they have chairs set up that recline and they all get together for about a twenty minute cat nap," says Bridget Penwell, RN, an outpatient cardiac rehab nurse at OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center. "I'm not sure everybody can just do a cat nap like that, but, I think, just relaxing and resting for that twenty minutes - closing your eyes - would be a big help."

Penwell advises, however, that catching a quick nap should never be a substitute for getting your recommended 7 to 8 hours of sleep each night.

Still, if you think a quick daytime snooze sounds like a good idea, check with your physician first. Oh, and better clear it with your boss too.