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COMMENT AND ANALYSIS

Proven value of the 'power nap'

By Carole Spiers, Special to Gulf News
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With our sort of climate, this surely ought to be 'siesta' country. Yet Dubai's corporate culture seems to be set sharply against any idea of an afternoon nap. Maybe the very idea just looks too much like laziness.

In the United Kingdom, the United States and Hong Kong, however, many enlightened corporate players have studied the issue in a more detailed fashion, to gain professional insight into the work/rest equation as a major factor in the optimising of human resources in this age of long hours and high-pressure working.

And researchers have concluded that a 20-minute sleep in mid-afternoon can actually improve the memory and reverse information overload, while having a positive effect on cell-repair and heart function. Also, the raising of the feet in line with the heart, when lying down, it also boosts circulation.

But that 20-minute limit is necessary. Beyond it, you are into deep sleep, from which you might emerge in a temporarily confused state ('sleep inertia').

Since 20 minutes is also the time it takes for caffeine to stimulate your concentration, it has even been suggested, but not proven, that a cup of coffee immediately before lying down, will enable you to wake up in a perfectly alert condition!

One sleep consultant also declares that a short afternoon sleep can reduce stress-levels by enabling the mind to reset itself in the same way that a computer clears the temporary memory upon re-booting. According to him, a five-minute 'nap' is the equivalent of 20 minutes of night-sleep.

Hi-tech slumber aids

No-one, of course, is proposing that office-staff should be allowed to drop asleep at their desks.

A separate 'napping zone' should be set up, and hi-tech furnishers have been quick to come forward with suggestions for the sort of futuristic equipment for it that will help you make the most of those 20 precious minutes.

One of them is the EnergyPod, a semi-coocoon that reclines you into the optimal napping posture (also restful for the spine), while a built-in headphone cuts out ambient noise and soothes you to sleep.

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SPECIAL COVERAGE



Olympics 2008

After your 20-minute sleep allowance, a timer wakes you gently with a blend of soft lights and gentle vibration.

At least one step further into science fiction is the Oculus OV2, the nearest thing to a space capsule.

This one promises total environmental control, and takes ergonomics to unheard-of limits, with an electrostatic dust and pollen shield and a single touch-pad that controls all the main user interfaces.

As it can replicate natural daylight, and also features a touchscreen display and two-way wireless communications, its uses possibly extend a bit further than just the afternoon nap.

Perhaps this one is the ultimate solo live-work unit!

Although we have not heard of any local takers for the OV2, I understand that the first batch of EnergyPods have actually been delivered to a Dubai client recently. So we could be on the verge of taking up the centuries-old siesta culture in a very 21st-century form.

The writer is a BBC broadcaster and motivated speaker, with 20-year experience as CEO of Carole Spiers' Group, an international stress consultancy based in London.

Key Points

20-minute sleep

• A 20-minute sleep in mid-afternoon actively improves performance

• A separate slumber zone must be set-up, allowing restful posture

• Special pods are appearing on the market, for optimal napping

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