

BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Napping May Be in Our Genes

*The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is working to develop brain healthy communities, creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health, optimizing brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. **Today we are looking at the role our genes play in napping and the implications to brain health and performance.***

As kids, many of us fought those afternoon naps — mostly because of FOMO (fear of missing out) — but as adults, we long for a midday nap. Unfortunately, napping as adults is often frowned upon. Naps are believed to make us less productive and can prevent us from getting a good night’s sleep. Whether you believe napping is a good thing or a bad thing, new research suggests that it might be a genetic thing.

A recent article in the [Harvard Gazette](#) highlights a new study from researchers at BHI-partner Massachusetts General Hospital and the University of Murcia in Spain that suggests napping is regulated by our genes. Researchers identified genes associated with sleep duration, insomnia, and when people sleep. Their goal was to identify genetic variations that are associated with napping.

The researchers found that in many cases, taking a nap is not a sign of laziness or a behavioral choice, but is driven by our genetics and our biology. They identified at least three potential genetic mechanisms that promote napping:

- Amount of sleep: People who need more sleep.
- Disrupted sleep: People who have difficulty sleeping or experience poor quality sleep.
- Early risers: People who regularly wake up early.

As sleep research continues to evolve, the idea that an afternoon nap is bad for you seems to be fading. In fact, as we get older many of us experience age-related decay in the quality of our nighttime sleep and some studies suggest that a daytime nap is a good way to help us get the amount of sleep that we need.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

Harvard Health and the BHI recommend these tips for making the most of your afternoon nap.

- Keep it short. A 20- to 30-minute nap is ideal. Even napping for just a few minutes has benefits, but longer naps may lead to grogginess that can be difficult to shake off.
- Find a dark, quiet, cool place. You can make the most of your nap time by dozing off quickly. A cool place with reduced light and noise will help you fall asleep faster.
- Schedule your nap. Being so tired that you are falling asleep during the day can be uncomfortable and dangerous, especially if you're driving. Scheduling a regular nap time may help you get to sleep faster and wake up quicker.
- Don't let caffeine derail your nap. It takes some time for the effects of caffeine to be felt. Some studies suggest taking a nap immediately after drinking a caffeinated beverage, before it takes effect, works best. Or wait until after your nap before drinking caffeine.
- **BE BRAIN HEALTHY and adopt a lifestyle** that includes thoughts, behaviors, emotions, responses, and language that promote brain health protective factors:
 - Stress resilience
 - Nutrition
 - Physical activity
 - Sleep
 - Social connection
 - Emotional wellbeing
 - Meaning and Purpose
 - Cognitive stimulation and creativity
 - Engaging with nature
 - General health
 - Positive impacts

About the Brain Health Initiative (www.brainhealthinitiative.org)

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is a cutting-edge, new approach to protecting brain health, optimizing brain performance, and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI builds brain healthy communities through education, collaboration, research, innovation, and action, with a specific focus on *brain health promotion, prevention, early detection, evidence-based intervention, and optimization of performance*. The BHI is creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Join the **Be Brain Healthy** movement, **because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference**. To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).