

Penticton Workplace Wellness Network Newsletter June 2009



The Afternoon Slump

The afternoon seems to drag on. You look up at the clock and it's almost 3 p.m. The day is not even done yet, but why do you feel so tired? You wish you could take a snooze, but, alas, work needs to get done. Many of us know the afternoon slump rather well. Your energy levels go down. It's hard to focus and think.

Why Does This Happen? The afternoon sleepies have a lot to do with our biological clock, known as the circadian cycle. Our biological clock is affected by a variety of things: amount and type of light we receive, body temperature, release of different hormones; some cause sleepiness while others cause alertness and the oxygen circulating in our blood.

Our biological clock affects how alert we feel and how sleepy we feel during the 24-hour day. For example, at night, there are changes in our biological clock that make us tired. We receive less natural light, our body temperature lowers, and a hormone called melatonin is released. Our body slows down, which decreases the need for oxygen. All of this together produces sleepiness and, as a result, we sleep.

For many people, there is another natural release of melatonin and drop in their body temperature, and it happens mid-afternoon, around 3 p.m. This drop is not as big as the one we experience at night, but it does make us sleepy. This afternoon sleepiness can affect our focus and mood. Basically, we are in dire need of a nap! Napping is a very good way to combat the afternoon slump. Researchers have shown that an afternoon nap (a short sleep of no more than 20 minutes) improves our mood, our ability to focus, and our reaction time. If you are fortunate to have the chance to nap in the afternoon, then you should take it when you're feeling sleepy.

However, many workplaces frown on the afternoon snooze. But don't despair! There is a natural way to combat your biological clock: physical activity.

Physical activity does a lot to help beat the afternoon slump. Taking a physical activity break around 3 p.m. will help you stay focused and work more efficiently. So get moving! *Go for a walk during your coffee break. Take five minutes to do some stretches at your desk. Stand up while on the phone.* Use your exercise ball. Walk over to chat with co-workers rather than send an e-mail. Take the long way to the bathroom. Climb a few flights of stairs in your building.

Although your biological system plays a role in the afternoon blahs, there may be other factors making you more sleepy than usual. Here are some of those factors and things you can do to lessen their effect on you.

- **Stress level.** Stress can increase alertness in some people, but it can also increase sleepiness. If you're under a lot of stress, consider what you can do to decrease the stress in your life.
- **Getting enough sleep.** The amount of sleep people need varies from person to person, but most of us need between seven to nine hours a night. The quality of the sleep is also important, so make sure your sleep is adequate in both quantity and quality. If you aren't getting enough quality sleep at night, you will be tired during the day.
- **Lunch choices.** Skipping meals, eating unbalanced meals or drinking alcohol at lunch can affect your energy levels in the afternoon. Have lunches that include at least three of the four food groups. And avoid overeating too. All that extra digestion your body has to do takes energy away from your brain.
- **Boredom.** If you don't find your work stimulating, it will be harder to stay focused and alert. If you can, vary your active tasks with your more passive tasks to add variety to your day.

Many of your co-workers probably feel the afternoon slump too. Get together with your co-workers to come up with strategies for keeping your energy levels up.

Adapted from www.healthyalberta.com

JCI DISCOVERY CHALLENGE June 13th

Enter a workplace team in the JCI Discovery Challenge 2009. This is a scavenger hunt style race where teams of two seek out challenge stations throughout Penticton using clues then perform challenges of skill, logic and endurance at those stations. This is a charitable fundraiser so teams must raise \$200 in pledges to qualify.

Proceeds go to the Okanagan Conservation Alliance.

Register before June 7th.

Information available at www.discoverychallenge.ca