

Letter from the Industrial Physician



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A little ingenuity during lunch break improves afternoon performance!?

Since I work as a freelancer, my lunch break is often used as travel time, and I am not in the habit of making special efforts to improve my afternoon performance. However, apparently, depending on how you spend your lunch break, your afternoon performance can make a big difference.

For example, one research report on college students conducted the following experiment (Ref. 1). The subjects were divided into two groups: one group that took a 20-minute nap and one group that did not take a nap, and each group was further divided into four groups according to whether or not they drank a canned coffee (caffeine intake group) before taking a nap. That is, the four groups were “with nap and canned coffee,” “with nap and no canned coffee,” “without nap and canned coffee,” and “without nap and no canned coffee. The participants were then given 45 minutes to complete the task and their comprehension of the assignment was evaluated. The results are as follows (1) The group with a nap had a higher percentage of correct answers than the group without a nap. (2) The group with coffee cans had a higher percentage of correct answers than the group without coffee cans. (3) The group with a nap and coffee cans had the highest percentage of correct answers. In other words, the results showed that the combination of napping and canned coffee (caffeine) improved afternoon performance (see figure on the left). Another study has also shown that light exercise during the lunch break improves work efficiency (Ref. 2). In this study, subjects were divided into the following three groups: “no rest: solving a total of 15 questions in a row,” “no exercise: taking a 15-minute break in the middle,” and “exercise: jogging on a treadmill for 10 minutes in the middle. The results showed that performance improved in the order of [no break] < [no exercise] < [exercise].

Collectively, it seems that you can spend your lunch break taking a nap, doing light exercise, or enjoying a canned coffee. The important thing may be to find the best way that suits you best.

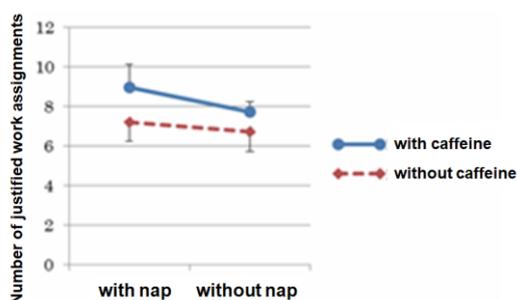


Figure: Effects of napping and caffeine intake on performance

Percentage of correct answers by examinees (%)

examinee	no rest	no exercise	with exercise
A	70	66	66
B	63	58	69
C	78	85	83
D	61	49	56
E	48	45	48
F	59	65	69
G	42	50	49
H	49	62	62
I	45	59	72
average	57	60	64