

Napping 2023

Thomas A. Burns PhD.

Klamath Falls, Oregon

Napping is a common behavior for humans early and late in life. In infancy and early childhood frequent naps contribute to the rapid growth process which requires these “time outs” to solidify changes and prepare for new ones. At the other end of the age spectrum, increased time sleeping and napping assist in maintaining bodily systems challenged by the inevitable physiological and psychological deterioration associated with advancing age.

In modern life, unfortunately, frequent napping during the day by seniors in their later years serves quite another function. With increasing age, seniors lose more and more of their physical capabilities. They also suffer isolation and loss of self worth due to: 1) the death of spouses, family and friends, 2) the absence of productivity after retirement, 3) living alone, and 4) being geographically separated from family. In this context, frequent napping during the day is one way aging seniors try to escape the boredom, disappointment, and depression that they are suffering as their lives witness a steady decline in quality.

Sustained physically by medical technology, increased longevity for these “suspended” seniors is of questionable value under these circumstances. Days spent reading, watching television, roaming the internet, and tending pets can not compensate for the losses in both close social contact and the satisfaction of maintaining personal integrity and contributing to society. Moreover, gathering the elderly together in senior communities mostly serves to emphasize the negative conditions of loss and deterioration from which all are suffering.

Frequent napping by the elderly is one symptom of the depressing situation that characterizes the lives of a great many seniors in modern society.

The Answer: Eliminate the very concept of “retirement,” which is a far too terminal concept! Instead, in the post full-time career/employment setting, facilitate the transition of seniors to participating in the public service, philanthropic, recreational, and artistic sectors where they can pursue alternative interests and continue to contribute their skills and knowledge at a flexible level of demand. Seniors need to be encouraged to remain meaningfully engaged in family and community to the level of their needs and abilities. And when the elderly can no longer participate in this approach to senior living, society needs to offer these seniors the option to make a graceful exit and avoid having to continue just existing physically with minimal quality of life. Increased longevity is a legitimate goal only so long as quality of life is sustained.