

What Polyphasic Sleeping is Really Like, in People's Own Words

By Paige Towers • May 31, 2016 at 2:34pm

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Sleeping in a single, eighthourorso block isn't for everyone. But some prefer to do away with the societal standard sleep rest schedule and truncate their Zzzs, slicing them up into three or more strategic chunks throughout the day in a process known as polyphasic sleep

. Why? Well, certain polyphasic practitioners think that sleeping all at once is simply inefficient; others have trouble sticking to a regular schedule and believe they're biologically inclined for shorter spurts of sleep; some are just intrigued by the idea of living on an alternative schedule.

There's some iffy science behind the polyphasic (multiphase) philosophy. The short of it: we go through five stages of sleep throughout the night, but only the final two — nREM and REM sleep — contain the sweet, restorative stuff. So, if you can time out naps in such a way that you can head directly into those stages, then you eliminate the unnecessary parts of sleep and enjoy only the good stuff. Think of it as nextlevel power napping — in fact, some of our greatest minds preferred these schedules.

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“The first couple of weeks are terrible. Absolutely terrible,” wrote one Quora user.

Not all polyphasic schedules are created equally. The three main types Everyman, Uberman and Dymaxion — differ in terms of difficulty. A version of the “Everyman” schedule, for instance, consists of one 4.5 hour block of rest and two 20 minute naps throughout the day, while the aptlynamed Uberman schedule consists of six 20minute naps throughout the day. All of them demand an almost complete rejiggering of how their life is organized. It's certainly not for traditionalists and can cause issues in maintaining social, romantic and working relationships.

But is the alternate worthwhile? It depends who you ask. Across forums like Reddit and Quora, polysleepers weigh in about the pros and cons of the lifestyle. After sifting through them, it's safe to say that the schedule is not for the faint of heart.

1. You might feel really awful while your body adjusts to your new sleep schedule.

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Polyphasic sleepers often boast about the benefits of their unusual segmented sleep schedules, claiming to feel more alert, have more energy and need as many as six hours less

sleep a day. But completely restructuring a sleep schedule is not easy and they make no qualms about the fact that it wasn't easy getting to that point.

“The first couple of weeks are terrible. Absolutely terrible,” wrote

Quora user, Eeshan Malhotra, who stated that he adopted a polyphasic sleep schedule for roughly half a year when he was a college student. “My productivity went down, even though in a strictly temporal sense, I was getting 'more' out of my day.” Malhorta said he was on an Everyman schedule that gave him roughly 4.5 hours of sleep per day.

In response to the same question, Quora user, Srinu Kumar Kadamati, who describes himself as a “sleep experimenter & parttime sloth,” said that adopting a biphasic sleep schedule (which for him meant either sleeping either four to fouranda

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half hours a night plus 1.5 hours during the day sleeping six hours a night plus sleeping 20 minutes during the day) was difficult enough to master. Further segmenting sleep might have proven to be impossible.

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or

“The first 2 weeks suck until you transition into it,” Kadamati wrote. “This is where probably 95 percent of people give up with any alternative sleep cycle.”

On the more aggressive side, Quora user, Stephen Johnson, who claims to have successfully adopted (and enjoyed) an Uberman schedule for a month’s time, said a wretched time re transitioning into it a few months later, wrote:

"[...] it was absolute hell. Perpetual exhaustion, extreme irritability, lack of focus, zombielike trances — it was just horrible."

2. But if you're able to acclimate to your new polyphasic sleep schedule, it may start to feel very natural.

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Whether adjusting to a less “intense” poly schedule — like segmented sleep,

which is comprised of a “first sleep,” “second sleep” and a nap — or jumping all the way into something like the Uberman schedule, almost all who claim to have adopted a polyphasic sleep schedule report to feeling, well, utterly wrecked at first. But there has to be a reason for all this initial suffering, yes, and at one point does it get better?

Quora user, Sринi Kumar Kadamati, stated that although it “sucks” at first, “once you adjust, it becomes normal (just like how our regular 8 hour sleep cycle is normal to us — well MOST of us anyway).”

Another poly sleep, Peter Sandager Jeppesen, who states that he’s a Dual Core 1 sleeper, remarks:

“[My Dual Core 1 schedule] feels great, but mostly because of the better work/life balance I have now. Other than that it doesn't feel different than being monophasic.”

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In fact, many internet users who are polyphasic sleepers or have tried it out in the past claim that — once they made it past the first two or three weeks — the schedule became more normalized. Once fully adjusted,

 d that his memory improved greatly and that he/she “found it was a lot easier to wake up/fall asleep. My mood improved and it make poly sleep a lot easier.”

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 Reddit user “completedesaster” reporte

3. You will quickly realize the utter importance of following your naptime guide.

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Wikipedia

Those who have tried or are currently using a poly sleep schedule can't urge this point enough: choose your naptimes wisely, and then by all means stick to them. Why? Missing even just one nap or part of one nap can lead to exhaustion and oversleep in the future — which may throw off your entire schedule. (Likewise, sleeping longer than an intended naptime can apparently leave you feeling groggy and not tired enough to sleep in the next interval — which, again, may throw you out of whack.)

As Quora user, Stephen Johnson, puts it: “Missing a nap by more than 5 minutes during the adjustment period is the easiest way to fail quickly.”

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The only issue with this “don’t miss a nap” rule, of course, is life and its vast unpredictableness. As Quora user, Srinu Kumar Kadamati, states, “The problem with alternative sleep cycles is you need to sleep at about the same times everyday AND you can’t miss any of the shorter naps in the daytime.” He continues on, saying: “If you do — you’re feel super super groggy and tired the rest of the day until you nap [sic].”

Some advice? As Eeshan Malhotra writes,

“[...] it is very important to work around your daily schedule to fix these times, or you’re just not going to be able to keep up.”

4. Your social and romantic life may take a toll.

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Depending on the polyphasic sleep schedule you choose, you may be napping as many as six times a day. This type of schedule doesn’t bode well for social engagements, especially

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when some of those naptimes may fall around happy hour or dinner time. And because you can't ignore the clock as a poly sleeper, there isn't much room for flexibility and spontaneity.

"I loved the amount of time and energy I had, but it was nearly impossible to have a social life when my day had to be so strictly regimented," wrote

Quora user, Stephen Johnson, about his experiences after switching to an Uberman schedule.

Reddit user FearandGonzo had a similar thought

. "It was really hard to keep up on the weekends when people wanted to be out doing things from noon until midnight and I had to run home and sleep for an hour or I felt dead."

A polyphasic sleep schedule can affect your sex life as well.

Quora user Arsene Hodali

— who identifies as an Uberman sleeper — a polyphasic sleep schedule can affect your sex life as well. "Sex becomes strictly an activity, like going to the gym," he wrote. "It is in no way something you do before you sleep."

5. You'll have time to take on so many additional projects.

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the Puredoxyk,

blogger who created the Uberman cycle, first experimented with alternative sleep schedules in college. With a friend, she first tried Fuller's Dymaxion schedule — and was blown away by what a full 22 hours awake allowed them to accomplish.

“We were fulltime college students with jobs,” she told us, “we both volunteered in the Shakespeare theater, we played D&D and went to parties and kept our rooms spotless and our grades up, and still seemed to have lots of time to relax.”

Pure's sentiments are echoed across forums where those who successfully adopt polyphasic schedules find themselves to be extremely productive and able to take on and finish new projects and hobbies.

6. You might get bored with all that extra time.

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Like Puredoxyk, many people who embark on a poly sleep lifestyle are looking to gobble up more of life's most elusive concept: time. And while having more hours to learn French or finish that novel sounds fun, some practitioners encourage potential future 'poly sleepers' to ask themselves this: what, exactly, are you going to do with all that extra time?

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“The downside was I had so much free time I often was bored, especially during the overnight awake period. I couldn’t make too much noise with roommates so I had to find quiet hobbies to keep me occupied,” wrote FearAndGonzo on Reddit. “It’s amazing and then unbearably boring,” Quora user Arsene Hodali. He went on to say that, with all that extra time on his hands, he eventually ran out of things to keep himself entertained. “Everyone who’s ever successfully been on the Uberman Sleep Schedule longterm eventually stops,” Hodali said, “and most say that the inflexibility of the schedule combined with the boredom of it all finally got to them. It go to me as well.”

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A Quora user named John L. Miller, who states that he tried polyphasic sleep when he was traveling, simply stated,

“I wasn’t productive, I didn’t think terribly well, and I was bored with a lot of the extra time I was awake.”