How to use the Navy SEAL Sleep Technique to fall asleep fast

By Michele Ross

Every day, it seems there’s another viral hack making its rounds that promises to transform your quality of life for the better. In the realm of sleep, one such hack that’s been trending on TikTok all summer long is the Navy SEAL Sleep Technique — initially shared by author, podcaster, and former Navy SEAL officer Jocko Willink, and made even more popular by lifestyle coach Nick Vitello

To get a better sense of this napping strategy—including what it involves, how effective it is, and how it compares to other popular sleeping techniques like the 4 7 8 Sleep Method and the Military Sleep Method—we spoke to Po-Chang Hsu, MD, a medical content expert for Sleeping Ocean and graduate of the Tufts University School of Medicine.

Before we dive in, remember that sleep hacks can only get you so far. To give yourself a greater chance of better sleep, it’s worth investing in the best mattress for your body type and preferred sleeping position.

What is the Navy SEAL Sleep Technique?

“The Navy SEAL Sleep Technique involves laying the back on the floor at the edge of the bed and then putting the legs on the bed,” Dr. Hsu begins. “This puts the sleeper in a position similar to the letter Z, but with the laps stretching a bit onto the bed. The legs are elevated at a 90-degree to 120-degree angle.”

In addition, it’s important to highlight that the Navy SEAL Sleep Technique is actually geared for a short, restorative nap of eight to 10 minutes (rather than a full night’s rest) to stay alert when you’re short on sleep and crunched for time. “In a military sleep manual, special forces are advised to use breaks in combat for an afternoon nap,” he explains.

Does the Navy SEAL Sleep Technique work?

While countless TikTok hacks don’t get green-lit by experts, this one gets Dr. Hsu’s official stamp of approval. “This hack can help most people sleep in less than eight minutes,” he says. According to Dr. Hsu, this unique resting position inhibits venous pressure, “which would have been an issue when lying down [flat, but isn’t] in this position.”

He continues, “Raising the legs above the heart makes pumping blood to the legs more difficult, lowering the blood pressure in the legs.” This redistribution of blood flow from your feet and legs to other parts of the body—like the heart and brain—can boost relaxation and comfort, helping you to nod off for a quick nap.

How to use the Navy SEAL Sleep Technique

“Using this technique is best when there's too little time to sleep,” Dr. Hsu shares. “By practicing this technique for an eight-minute sleep, many people have said they feel sufficiently rested and that it feels like 6 hours’ [worth of] sleep.”

Better yet, this sleep technique is simple enough to put into practice yourself. Here’s how to do it:

Lay down in a position that permits you to elevate your feet above your heart. (You can lay on the floor and rest your feet at the foot of your bed, or on a couch or chair.)

Set your alarm clock for eight to 10 minutes.

Close your eyes and wake up feeling more alert than before.

Navy SEAL Sleep Technique vs 4 7 8 Sleep Method

Dr Andrew Weil, Founder and Director of the University of Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine, developed the 4 7 8 Sleep Method, which he described as “a natural tranquilizer for the nervous system.” It involves a deep, rhythmic pattern of breathing that activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which leads into “rest and digest” mode (versus the “fight or flight” stress response of the sympathetic nervous system).

“While the 4 7 8 Sleep Method focuses on breathing exercises and tension release, the Navy SEAL sleep technique does more,” Dr. Hsu says, “It helps the body have better circulation and makes it possible for a short sleep or nap.” Again, he reiterates that the Navy SEAL sleeping hack is geared for naps, while the 4 7 8 method is ideal for nighttime use and helps you fall into slumber faster.

It is also worth noting that the 4 7 8 Sleep Method requires a longer time commitment. You'll need to repeat the breathing cycle three to four times, twice daily—and it may take up to four to six weeks of regular practice before you notice any major changes. On the other hand, some people may find it easier to benefit from the Navy SEAL nap hack on the first few tries.

Navy SEAL Sleep Technique vs Military Sleep Method

The Military Sleep Method is another hack that made its rounds on TikTok before the Navy SEAL Sleep Technique took off. “The Military Sleep Method focuses on muscle relaxation,” according to Dr. Hsu, and involves conscious tension release in the body, calming visualizations, and internal repetition of the words “‘don’t think” if your mind wanders.

The Military Sleep Method is similar to the 4 7 8 Sleep Method as both are meant to activate the parasympathetic nervous system. Each is also geared for falling asleep more quickly and soundly at night. On the other hand, the Navy SEAL Sleep Technique is a quick fix if you feel like you need to recharge in the daytime with a quick nap.

“The Navy SEAL Sleep Technique is a perfect hack for those without time to sleep, but it should not be used to replace a full night's sleep,” Dr. Hsu explains. He also warns that you shouldn’t rely on it too often, or as a replacement for a full night’s rest.

“It's like fast charging a battery built to slow charge. In the long run, the battery's lifespan will be greatly affected,” Dr. Hsu says. In other words, while quick and intermittent charges may help in the short term, you’re much better off investing in a longer, more sustainable charge in the form of quality nighttime rest.

“Most sleep benefits are not achieved when the body is charged quickly with the Navy SEAL technique,” he adds. “The brain and immune system don't get rejuvenated fully,” that is, compared to gaining consistent, high-quality rest overnight.

How to sleep better at night: quick tips

While the Navy SEAL Sleep Technique may help you recharge quickly if you feel sluggish throughout the day, it’s still essential to prioritize getting better sleep at night. With that in mind, Dr. Hsu shares a few parting tips to sleep more soundly:

Practice healthy stress management.

Dr. Hsu says one of the best ways to encourage quality sleep is to be aware of how you respond to stress, which is a common sleep disruptor. "It’s always a good idea to try mindfulness practices, breathing exercises, gentle yoga, journaling, or listening to relaxing sounds—especially before bed,” he says, “No working in bed or late hours if you want to sleep well.”

Stick to a consistent sleep schedule.

When you go to bed each night and wake up every day is crucial if you want to sleep better at night. “Stick to a consistent sleep schedule to help your circadian clock run smoothly,” Dr. Hsu advises.

Optimize your bedroom environment.

Your bedroom environment also influences how well you’ll be able to sleep. Dr. Hsu recommends keeping your bedroom "comfortably cool (around 60 to 67 degrees Fahrenheit), dark, and quiet.”

Other measures you can take, according to Dr. Hsu, are to block outside noises with a white noise machine or earplugs – or limit disruptive noises and light by investing in a soft eye mask with built-in Bluetooth earphones.

Another way to optimize your bedroom environment for better sleep is to give your existing mattress a refresh with one of the best mattress toppers for added comfort and support. Also, make sure you're sleeping on the best pillow for your preferences and body type — otherwise, you'll be burdened by aches and pains, or night sweats if you're prone to sleeping hot.