

# Wake up to the benefits of a siesta

**0**  **H**  
 H holidays in the Mediterranean can be a frustrating business for northern Europeans. Just as you are ready for a midday stroll around the town, the locals take to their beds and life comes to a standstill.

**1**   
 But it seems the Southerners know what is good for them. Studies at the biomedical centre for life and sport in France suggest that we are programmed to sleep in the afternoon and that we may suffer if we press on regardless.

**2**   
 Researchers studied the behaviour of Grand Prix mechanics, who often work through the night, and for whom alertness is essential if life-threatening mistakes are to be avoided. They found that the mechanics had most problems concentrating in the mid-afternoon and that when they introduced a rest period from 3 to 4pm, their round-the-clock performance improved.

**3**   
 It is not only concentration which takes a dive in the after-

noon. Body temperature falls in the early to mid-afternoon and brainwaves slow down, reflecting their nocturnal pattern. Pierre Portero, director of the centre, says sleep split into chunks was the norm of our ancestors because they had to keep alert because of animals and other dangers. He believes we still possess these genes.

**4**   
 Professor Carl Hindmarch, founder of the British Sleep Society, also believes in the biological proof that we need afternoon sleep. "Especially when on holiday, people tend to put their sleepiness down to a large lunch or intense midday heat. But research does suggest that biological forces are at work," he says. He points to the tendency of the very young and the very old to nod off in the afternoon for further evidence.

**5**   
 Portero's experiments with mechanics showed that most people soon adapt to afternoon sleep. Professor Hindmarch also thinks afternoon naps are healthy. At night, the first half of sleep is moderate-to-deep sleep. As the night progresses, shallower sleep increases. It is during deep sleep that hor-

mones, which renew tissue and strengthen our immune systems, are released. Therefore, people who split their sleep between five or six hours at night and two in the afternoon may be receiving double benefits.

**6**   
 For all the assumed benefits of a siesta, it may be impossible for northern Europeans to accommodate it into their working day. But shorter sleeps may also reap benefits. Portero's studies of sailors in long-distance races showed that regular naps of 30 - 40 minutes enabled them to stay alert without ever having long stretches of sleep.

**7**   
 It is thought that "owls" - those who get up late and go to bed late - may adapt more easily than early-to-bed, early-to-rise "larks". Whichever you are, holidays are a good time to try it out. As the British humourist Noel Coward said: "Only mad dogs and Englishmen go out in the midday sun".

## PAPER 1 - READING PART 1

You are going to read a newspaper article about sleep. Choose the most suitable heading from the list A-I for each part (1-7) of the article. There is one extra heading which you do not need to use. There is an example at the beginning (0).

- A Siestas improve overall efficiency at work.
- B Long sleeps are not necessary.
- C Owls and larks.
- D Siestas can be traced back to our ancestors.
- E Southerners know best.
- F Releasing the hormones.
- G Siestas do not benefit everyone.
- H Frustrated holiday-makers.
- I It's part of our biological make-up.