

Time Change Effects on Our Body

On Sunday March 12, 2017 clocks go back one hour and Daylight Saving Time begins! “Daylight Saving Time (DST) is the practice of setting the clocks forward one hour from standard time during the summer months, and back again in the fall, in order to make better use of natural daylight.” Although this change affects everyone differently, Dr. Alon Avidan (UCLA Sleep Disorders Center) has noted that it can take one day to adjust for each hour of time change that an individual experiences.

Changing the clocks will increase the amount of natural light that is available in the evening (making days seem longer) but this may be at the expense of our sleeping routine. Losing one hour of sleep may seem insignificant, but studies have shown that if you do not properly prepare for this change, you could suffer the consequences. When individuals do not get enough sleep they can have feelings of fatigue, increased moodiness and slower reaction times, all of which can lead to increased traffic accidents, workplace injuries and puts some people at an increased risk of MI/heart attacks.

The reason it can be so difficult for some to adjust to a time change is due to a natural process that occurs in most living organisms, referred to as Circadian Rhythm. This is a cycle that controls physical, mental and behavioural changes and primarily responds to light cues in the environment. This process is controlled by a group of nerve cells in the brain called the suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN) which are located in the hypothalamus, just above the optic nerves. The SCN is the structure that controls the body’s production of melatonin, the hormone that makes you feel tired and is associated with sleep onset. When there is less light, for example at nighttime, the SCN tells the brain to increase its production of melatonin to make you drowsy and prepare you for bedtime. In the morning, when the amount of light increases, the suprachiasmatic nucleus tells the brain to decrease melatonin production. This is the reason why artificial light from computers and cell phones can throw off the natural circadian rhythm; adjusting a clock, even by as little as 1 hour, can affect the natural pattern that your body and its environment have created.

There are steps you can take to prepare for, reduce the side effects of and increase your energy levels throughout Daylight Savings. In the days leading up to March 12, 2017 you can begin to go to bed earlier; even as little as 15-20 minutes can help you ease into the change. Also, be sure to avoid alcohol and caffeine in the evening, avoid computer and cell phone use before bed as well as other light exposure, and sleep in a cool, quiet and dark room. As soon as you wake in the morning, getting exposure to natural light right away can help to boost energy and signal the SCN to decrease the production of melatonin. Throughout the daytime, drinking more water, adding 30 minutes of exercise, and even listening to music and dancing can increase your energy levels and make you feel more alert so that when Daylight Saving Time begins this year, you can be prepared.

Source: [Huffington Post/Time and Date](#)

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Accq Sleep Lab Locations

Paris
139 Grand River St. North
3rd Floor
Paris, ON
t. 519-442-6389
f. 519-442-7983

Owen Sound
945 3rd Avenue East
Suite 11
Owen Sound, ON
t. 519-371-5217
f. 519-371-5736

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