

Daylight Savings Time Ends

Sunday, November 4, marked the end of Daylight Saving Time this year, and unlike the springtime transition in March, turning the clocks *back* an hour in November means a precious extra hour of sleep!

Compared to the jet lag-like feeling that comes with turning the clocks forward in the spring, this weekend's extra hour of sleep felt like a gift -- one that many of the 43 percent of Americans who say they rarely or never get a good night's sleep couldn't wait to receive.

"We are so sleep deprived to begin with, the extra hour of sleep is welcome!" says Dr. Robert Oexman, director of the Sleep to Live Institute and HuffPost blogger.

Thanks to that extra hour, "falling back" isn't nearly as disruptive to our bodies as "springing forward." Our circadian rhythms, or our bodies' natural clocks, operate on a slightly longer than 24-hour cycle, he says. "Being able to extend our day is much easier than it is to shorten our day. The body clock is used to a little bit of extra time."

As such, it can take up to a week to feel back to normal after the *beginning* of Daylight Saving Time in March, and experts recommend preparing by adjusting bedtime by a few minutes each night leading up to the time change. But in the fall, all it usually takes is one night. "We tell people they don't even really need to prepare for the change when we get an extra hour of sleep," says Oexman. Falling back may even help us prioritize sleep. After the time change, it will get dark earlier, which could prompt us to hit the hay sooner, especially compared to the long, well-lit summer evenings that encouraged us to stay up past our bedtimes.

It may even remind us to value sleep long afterward. In the days after the spring transition, car accidents, heart attacks and injuries on the job all increase. But after we turn the clocks back, we see a *decrease* in heart attacks and car accidents, a testament to the power of sleep, says Oexman. "It shows the importance of even gaining one hour of sleep. If we can make an effort to get a little more sleep, maybe we can control diseases like heart disease or diabetes or risk of accidents," he says. However, there is a little bad news. Soon, the sleep-deprived workers who find themselves putting in long hours at the office could be making both the morning *and* evening commute in the dark. And the early nightfall might make it more difficult to stay awake for some people, especially the elderly, says Oexman. "The tendency is to get tired, watch TV in the dark and nap, and then when it's time to go to bed, they don't sleep well and wake up very early in the morning," he says. The dark evenings and trouble sleeping can make some susceptible to Seasonal Affective Disorder. Talk to your doctor if you're feeling sleepiness paired with a stronger appetite, decreased energy, unhappiness and a loss of interest in work or other activities. Others may experience a simple dip in mood and energy that Oexman says is preventable with a few simple steps:

- **Expose yourself to plenty of light.** When it starts to get dark out early, turn on the lights around the house, he says, to remind your brain that it's not quite time for bed. Get outside during the day, maybe during your lunch break, for natural light. If it's too cold, open your blinds to at least let some sunshine into your home.
- **Exercise late.** Typically, experts don't recommend working out too close to bedtime, but a late-afternoon or early-evening sweat session can help keep you energized during those dreary evenings.
- **Try light therapy.** Oexman suggests buying a small box to keep on your desk at the office, or for women to turn one on while putting on makeup in the morning. The gadget mimics natural sunlight, so a regular lamp won't do the trick.