

How to sleep soundly in spite of the time change

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Twice a year, Albertans reset their clocks for daylight saving time and begin the more difficult task of resetting their internal clock as well. While daylight saving time has been accepted for decades by most

Canadians, it can play havoc with sleep patterns no matter your age.

This weekend Albertans will see the [time](#) fall back an hour. To ensure you get the best rest you can, here are some pointers to ponder from U of A [sleep](#) expert Joanna MacLean, a University of Alberta associate professor of pediatrics, member of the Alberta Respiratory Centre and the medical director of the Sleep Lab at the Stollery Children's Hospital.

What are some of the common issues that you see in your work when it comes to daylight saving time?

Things like heart attacks in adults and car accidents are more likely to occur in the week following the time change.

Part of the problem with daylight saving time is that many of us are not getting enough sleep on a regular basis and not operating based on our biological rhythms. And so when you have that one-hour shift, it becomes a bigger problem if you're not well rested to begin with.

What impact does sleep deprivation have on a person?

Reaction time is slowed and decision-making capacity is impaired. Sleep deprivation also changes metabolism, increases inflammation and puts our body in a stressed state.

What we call 'acute on [chronic sleep deprivation](#)' tends to be the worst combination. So if you're chronically sleep deprived and then you have an acute loss of an hour, you're going to be more impaired than if you're simply chronically sleep deprived.

While there are more noticeable problems with daylight saving time in the spring, are there any concerns in the fall when we gain an hour?

Because we get that extra hour of sleep in the fall, it doesn't seem to have as big of an effect—but you still need to think ahead.

Maintaining a regular sleep schedule is important.

A lot of us like to stay up late on Friday night, sleep in on Saturday, stay up late on Saturday night, sleep in on Sunday and then find it hard to get to sleep on Sunday night. You start the week with what is often referred to as a Monday morning hangover because you haven't got the amount of sleep you would typically for the other days during the week.

The more we maintain a regular sleep schedule, the better off we are, and the less you're going to feel the impact of that one-hour change on Monday morning.

For parents, is it useful to try easing into a new sleep schedule rather than making an abrupt change?

Yes. We tend to be better at doing things slowly as opposed to more abruptly. So figuring out a schedule that will help ease into the time change will make a difference from a bedtime point of view.

I think it's a good opportunity with [daylight saving time](#) to look at your overall sleep schedule and see if you can make adjustments to make sure that you're getting the amount of sleep you should be getting.

Are we as a society chronically sleep deprived?

Yes we are. I don't think we see sleep as being important to our health. In North America there is almost a competition—people brag about only needing four or five hours of sleep a night. But there's good data to say that degree of sleep deprivation is unhealthy and associated with neurocognitive impairments such as poor choice making.

What are some practical tips people should think about to get a better rest?

We have the means of artificially changing the things that keep us awake. We should be thinking about ways to decrease that bright light exposure, whether it's dimming lights in the evening as you get closer to bedtime or restricting screen time within an hour of bedtime.

What other advice is there for those who struggle with the adjustment in their sleep schedule due to daylight saving time?

We know exercise improves the ability to fall asleep and the quality of sleep we get. The one thing to be aware of is timing. Exercise in the evening can make it hard to fall asleep. Generally the recommendation is to not exercise within two hours of bedtime. But that can vary, so figure out what time you can exercise and at what intensity, but still be able to get to sleep easily and on time.

Screen time is probably the biggest impediment to sleep. You should be looking at not only the amount of screen time you are exposed to, but also when you're using screens and then reducing their use around bedtime.

The one thing everybody really doesn't want to talk about is caffeine intake. Lots of people say caffeine has no impact on them being able to get to sleep. We know that even if it doesn't stop you from getting sleep, it does actually shift some of the rhythms for sleep. So you may not be getting the same quality sleep for the time that you're sleeping; reducing or eliminating caffeine could make your sleep time more efficient.

How helpful are the mental exercises many parents use with their kids?

They're absolutely helpful if you're somebody who has trouble shutting off at night. The more your brain is stimulated, the harder it is to fall asleep. So whether it's breathing exercises, meditation or reading something that has nothing to do with what you do during the day, those kinds of things can be helpful to help support your internal rhythms to get ready to fall asleep.

And those exercises have the same effect for adults as they do for kids.

Are there any good routines you recommend for parents?

It's figuring out something that is going to work for you, because everybody is different in terms of the things that are stimulating and things that are calming for them.

For instance, a lot of people think about having a warm bath before going to bed as something that's calming. But for some people, that's actually energizing and not the right activity for them. So it's important to figure out what it is for you or for your child that will help you wind down for the night. Eliminating screen time at least one hour, if not more, before bedtime is a good start. Then figuring out quiet activities that help get you get ready for sleep. This could include a bath, if that is calming, reading, storytelling, meditation or anything that sets you up to fall asleep.

Provided by University of Alberta

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