

Daylight Saving Time Change & Health

By CalBroker Magazine



If you're someone who groans at the idea of changing your clocks every spring and fall, you're far from alone. In fact, 63 percent of Americans support canceling daylight savings time for good. Experts in many fields have linked time change and health: We now know that daylight savings time can have real, measurable effects on the human body and brain.

Are your clients complaining about mysterious symptoms around the time they change their clocks? Educating them about this twice-yearly phenomenon can help them discern which symptoms necessitate an appointment with a healthcare provider — and which are simply occurring because of the disturbance to their circadian rhythms.

When Does Daylight Saving Time Occur?

You might use the popular phrase "spring forward, fall back" to help you remember which way to set your clocks. In the U.S., we change our clocks twice a year: one hour forward on the second Sunday in March and one hour backward on the first Sunday in November. Daylight saving time represents the period between the "spring forward" date and the "fall back" date.

Why Do We Have Daylight Saving Time?

Daylight saving time was enacted during World War I to align daylight with waking hours and conserve energy use. In the modern era, though, we don't spend as much energy on lighting — we may spend more energy overall by using heating and air conditioning during those early waking hours. Most research into daylight savings time proposes that the practice does more harm than good.

Recent data suggest that extended hours of afternoon sunlight could contribute to poor sleep, mood disorders, and substance abuse.

How Does Daylight Saving Time Affect Health?

Researchers have found that "springing forward" has more of a negative effect on our lives than "falling back." In the spring, we miss out on an hour of sleep. If you've felt irritated, sleepy, or even sick to your stomach for the first few days after the clocks change in either season, you're not imagining this. There are a few ways in which daylight savings time can affect the human body:

Poor Sleep

Feeling tired, groggy, or spaced out can be an immediate side effect of daylight saving time. This temporary tiredness that some people call "Sleepy Monday" can have mild to severe effects. Sleep disruption can lead to poor work performance, impaired judgment, and trouble sleeping the next night.

On the more severe end of the spectrum, experts have found there's an increase in car wrecks and heart attacks the Monday following the "spring forward" day. Regular sleep — roughly at the same time each night — greatly matters to a person's health.

Impaired Digestion

Oddly enough, the move to daylight savings time can trigger stomach issues in some people. This is because the body's circadian rhythm systematically controls functions like hormones, blood sugar, and digestion.

Changing your habits even slightly can throw off the body's internal sense of time and cause small changes that can cascade into larger ones.

Worse Mood

Most people experience a slight drop in mood or an increase in irritability if they do not get enough sleep. Others notice an uptick in stress and anxiety. Though the differences may be slight, they could spell trouble for personal and professional lives.

Proponents of getting rid of daylight savings time argue that these mental health drawbacks, like the physical health effects, are not worth saving an extra hour of daylight.

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Does Daylight Savings Time Affect Certain People More Than Others?

In short, yes. Certain individuals may be more sensitive to the effects of adding or subtracting an hour from the day:

- **Children:** Kids, especially young children, who miss an hour of sleep may be tired and irritable the next morning. These behavioral effects could cause problems when getting ready for school or daycare. They may affect classroom management for teachers as well.
- **Night shift workers:** People who work at nighttime may struggle to stay awake when an extra hour is added to their shift in November. Depending on their employer, they may not be paid for the extra hour they've worked, either.
- **People with sleep disorders:** Anyone with insomnia or a sleep disorder causing disrupted sleep may struggle to recalibrate to a new schedule twice a year.
- **People with mood disorders:** For most people, these effects of daylight savings time may go away after a day or two, but those with mood disorders, such as seasonal affective disorder, bipolar disorder, and depression, may find it more difficult to recover.

Would You Remove Daylight Savings Time From the Calendar?

Are you in favor of abolishing daylight savings time? If so, this dream may one day be a reality. Hawaii and Arizona, along with several U.S. territories, have never observed it. Twenty other states have begun making daylight savings time permanent. The U.S. Senate passed the Sunshine Protection Act in 2022, but the House of Representatives has yet to pass it.

How To Help Your Clients

For brokers, bringing up health issues people have with time change could lead to interesting and productive conversations. Some problems triggered by daylight savings time can be prevented, or at least lessened, by adopting healthy habits and shifting the daily schedule slightly over the course of a week instead of during one day. Clients with medical conditions or mood disorders may benefit from understanding the very real effects that the first few days of daylight savings time can trigger.

Help your clients understand the health effects of daylight savings time and point them toward qualified medical professionals or new insurance plans for symptoms that may be the signs of a more serious condition.

Sources:

1. ABC News: "Daylight saving time 2024 is ending: When do we 'fall back' an hour?."
2. American Academy of Sleep Medicine: "Daylight Savings Time."
3. Congress.gov: "H.R. 1279: Sunshine Protection Act of 2023."