

## Pelayo offers tips to deal with 'spring forward' clock change

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The change to daylight saving time and other changes to sleep schedules can make it hard to fall or stay asleep. In an effort to help you spring forward and stay on track, Stanford sleep expert Rafael Pelayo, MD, associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences, recently took questions on sleep research and offered techniques for making sure disruptions, such as the March 11 switch to daylight saving time, don't cut into your sleep. Below are Pelayo's responses to a selection of questions submitted through Twitter using the hashtag #AskSUMed, @replies to the @SUMedicine feed or through comments on the medical school's blog Scope. Other Stanford experts will be available in the future for questions as part of the Ask Stanford Med series.

**Erin asks: I'm the mom of a toddler and would love your suggestions for how to help him deal with the time change. In addition, my husband is a real night owl and tends to suffer every year when we "spring forward." How can people whose bodies don't like early mornings adjust to the time change?**

Pelayo answers: Unless your toddler needs to wake up at a set time, for example to go to childcare, your child will most likely self-correct. If your toddler does need to wake up at a set time, the following tips may be useful in making the transition smoother for him when the clocks change.

But your night-owl husband is a different situation. It is very difficult to go to bed early and much easier to stay up later. I would suggest he, and others with a similar problem, use the following tips to minimize the impact of the time shift. Go to bed 15 minutes earlier for a few nights preceding the time change. Make sure to avoid light as much as possible within an hour or two of going to sleep in order to adjust to an earlier bedtime. If possible, refrain from sleeping late during the weekend and rise within a few minutes of your usual wake-up time on workdays. Keeping the same wake time will help maintain the body's internal circadian rhythm. Upon awakening, immediately maximize your exposure to sunlight. If you're fatigued during the day, take a short afternoon nap.

**@ChilunjeZ asks: I can't seem to ever get an early night no matter what I try. I always tend to go to sleep after midnight. How can I develop healthy habits to help me get to bed at an earlier time and wake up earlier the next morning?**

**Pelayo answers:** It is important to remember that you did not always go to sleep after midnight so this is a behavior that you are capable of changing. Past studies have shown that your biological clock is located in an area of the brain called the suprachiasmatic nucleus. This clock sets your sleep schedule tendency based on a series of time givers called zeitgebers. Zeitgebers can be manipulated to adjust your sleep time.

To change your sleep-wake behavior, I recommend that you focus more on the specific time you want to wake up in the morning rather than the time you want to go to sleep at night. It is easier to force yourself to wake up, than it is to fall asleep. Generally speaking, humans have peak alertness about two hours before falling asleep. So it is extremely difficult to make large, abrupt shifts at bedtime. Instead, try locking in a

wake-up time of about 30 minutes earlier than usual for one week. The following week, move the wake-up time back another 30 minutes. Continue making these gradual adjustments over a period of time. Eventually, your wake-up time will predict the time you fall asleep. As you're making these adjustments to your sleep schedule, keep in mind that it is very important to lock in the same wake-up time on weekends and weekdays.

### **@skeptikai asks: Is it possible to train yourself to not need as much sleep? Or, is that bad for your health?**

**Pelayo answers:** Let me answer your question with another question: Can you train yourself to need less oxygen? Of course not. And, just as with oxygen, getting adequate sleep is essential to your well-being.

The real issue here is not to think of sleep as an inconvenience that needs to be minimized. Instead, think of it as the cornerstone of your health. If you attempt to train yourself to require less sleep then you may become sleep-deprived, which can be torturous and bad for your health. Give sleep as much priority as nutrition and exercise.

Overall, the amount of sleep you need to be refreshed should stay about the same over time. However if you have certain medical problems, your need for sleep may increase as a consequence of your health condition or illness. For example, if you have mild sleep apnea, you might need to increase your sleep time. However, you may find that as a result of addressing the actual medical problem you need less [sleep](#).

Provided by Stanford University Medical Center

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