

Clocks 'spring forward' on Sunday: Helping your kids adjust

March 10 2023, by Cara Murez



The annual shift to daylight saving time is a challenge for many parents,

whose children may struggle with the change.

A pediatrics sleep medicine expert offers some tips for making springing forward a little easier for all ages.

"Whether it be jet lag, [spring break](#) or daylight saving time, a break in sleep structure can make things challenging. But we have ways to cope with that," said Dr. Sonal Malhotra. She is an assistant professor of pulmonary and sleep medicine services at Baylor College of Medicine, in Houston.

Children tend to fall into three sleep categories depending on age, Malhotra said—infants under 6 months; toddlers and [young children](#) who have a [natural inclination](#) to wake early; and older kids and teens who struggle with morning wake-up times.

The [time change](#) isn't typically an issue for the youngest group, Malhotra said.

"At this age, children are still building their circadian rhythms," she said. "Although their [sleep schedules](#) are fragmented by naps throughout the day and night, there is still structure that ensures they get enough sleep."

The spring change is easier for the second age group than turning the clocks back in fall. It can be beneficial for parents to let them stay up later and sleep in more, Malhotra said.

For kids over 6 months of age who struggle to wake up in the morning, more work is needed to make sure they get enough shut-eye during times of disruption.

For future reference, she suggests encouraging your child to wake up and go to bed 15 minutes earlier four or five days ahead of the seasonal

switch, changing the routine every day until a goal bedtime is reached.

"Adjusting mealtimes and nap times to this revised schedule will also help these kids adjust to the time change," Malhotra said. "This group will especially benefit from a structured sleep schedule."

Good sleep habits are crucial. Children should be exposed to light during the day and it should gradually be reduced closer to bedtime. Blackout curtains or sleep masks can help kids fall asleep, she noted.

Other tips: Avoid any caffeine after 3 p.m. Put electronics away late in the day, and especially in the hour before bedtime. Keep sleeping environments dark and cool. Maintain a consistent sleep schedule year-round.

"If children do not have other serious sleep issues or comorbidities, we generally do not prescribe sleep aids," Malhotra said. "Other calming agents such as chamomile tea or warm baths are more beneficial."

In addition, this time of year comes with the double-whammy of seasonal allergies, which may affect kids' sleep. Congestion can lead to minor airflow blockage. Eczema may cause nighttime itching.

Malhotra recommends kids shower and change clothes before bedtime to help limit nighttime symptoms.

"Children of all ages experience different types of stressors at each stage of their lives, but a solid sleep structure will ensure their bodies can grow, recharge and handle their stress in an appropriate manner," Malhotra said.

More information: The American Academy of Pediatrics has more on [healthy sleep habits for children](#).

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