

# Washington, here's your wake-up call: Daylight saving time may impact your heart health

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Losing an extra hour of sleep may not be the worst thing that could happen when you "spring forward" at the start of daylight saving time.

According to the American Heart Association, celebrating its Centennial birthday as the world's leading nonprofit organization focused on heart and brain health for all, scientific researchers have noticed a marked increase in heart attacks and strokes in the days following this time change each year.

This year, daylight saving time begins on Sunday, March 10. Daylight saving time is the practice of setting the clocks an hour ahead of standard time to achieve longer evening daylight in the summer months. While gaining extra daylight may be a nice change, the transition could come with some health challenges.

According to a study of hospital admissions across Michigan, there was a 24% increase in heart attacks on the Monday following the switch to daylight saving time. In a study from Finland, researchers found that the overall rate of ischemic stroke was 8% higher during the first two days after a daylight saving time transition. Other research has found that, in general, more serious heart attacks occur on Mondays than on any other day of the week, making the day after the time change even more worrisome.

"We don't really know exactly why there is an increase in heart attacks and strokes during the change to daylight saving time. It's likely connected with the disruption to the body's internal clock, or its circadian rhythm," said American Heart Association volunteer expert Ruchi Kapoor, M.D., Ph.D. clinical assistant professor, Division of Cardiology, University of Washington.

"It's important to be aware of this increased risk, especially if you already have heart disease or other risk factors. Recognize the signs of a heart attack or stroke and call 9-1-1 if you or someone you're with experience any of those symptoms."

The American Heart Association offers a few tips to get ahead of the time change:

- Do start now to get outside and get as much natural light as possible each day. This can help adjust your body rhythm for the change to come.
- Do begin winding down a little earlier in the evenings ahead. While you can never make up lost sleep, going into the time change well-rested can help.
- Don't compensate with extra caffeine. It may feel like an extra coffee or two can help you through the mid-day slump, but too much caffeine is not heart-healthy.

"We know that the amount and the quality of sleep a person gets at any time of the year is essential to good health. That's why the American Heart Association has added sleep to our Life's Essential 8, which is our equation of 4 health factors and 4 health behaviors that are needed for good cardiovascular health," Kapoor said. "In addition to increasing the risk for cardiovascular conditions like [heart attack](#) and stroke, [lack of sleep](#) may also put people at risk of things like depression, cognitive decline and obesity."

Several recent studies highlight how sleep impacts your heart health:

- [A study](#) published in the *Journal of the American Heart Association* found that variations in sleep duration of more than two hours a night within the same week were tied to developing hardened arteries, known as atherosclerosis.
- [A study](#) published in the journal *Hypertension* found that the link between [excess weight](#) and higher blood pressure in adolescents was stronger among those who also had irregular sleep patterns. Irregular sleep patterns contributed to elevated blood pressure in teens who had more visceral fat, which is excess weight in the

belly/abdominal area.

- A [study](#) published in the *Journal of the American Heart Association* found about 1 in 4 women may develop irregular heart rhythms, known as [atrial fibrillation](#), after menopause, with stressful life events and poor sleep being leading contributing factors.
- [An abstract](#) presented at the American Heart Association's Scientific Sessions 2023 found that more than one-third of children in the U.S. did not get the amount of sleep recommended by the American Heart Association.

The Association's Life's Essential 8 recommended ideal level of sleep is:

- 7–9 hours daily for adults;
- 8–10 hours daily for ages 13–18 years;
- 9–12 hours daily for ages 6–12 years; and
- 10–16 hours daily for ages 5 and younger.

"More than 1 in 3 adults do not get the recommended amount of sleep for heart health. It's important to maintain a healthy sleeping pattern all year long, and there are some specific steps you can take to set yourself up for a good night's rest," Kapoor said.

- Don't hit snooze: Sleeping past your alarm can make you groggy in the morning. Try putting your alarm clock across the room so you must physically get out of bed to turn it off.
- Prioritize exposure to natural light: Maximize exposure to [natural light](#) during the day to regulate your body's internal clock and prepare for a restful night. Try going for a walk when you wake up in the mornings to promote [physical activity](#) while getting natural sunlight.
- Eat a healthy, [balanced diet](#): Enjoy a heart-healthy diet with plenty of fiber-rich vegetables, fruits, legumes and whole grains

and balance your calories throughout the day. When you get more calories late at night, sleep may be less peaceful.

- Watch what you drink: Drinking too many sugary, caffeinated or [alcoholic beverages](#) may lead to more disruptions during the night.
- Limit afternoon naps: Avoid taking long naps during the day because they can disrupt your sleep patterns and make it harder to achieve restful sleep at night. Instead, focus on maintaining consistent sleep patterns to support good overall sleep quality.
- Limit technology use in the evening: The blue light of most electronic devices can interfere with your circadian rhythm and melatonin production. Create a productive sleep environment by keeping electronic devices out of the bedroom. Aim to disconnect from screens at least one hour before bedtime to reduce exposure to blue light and promote better sleep quality.
- Create a relaxing bedtime routine: Engage in calming activities before bed, such as reading a book, journaling, taking a warm bath, or practicing relaxation exercises like deep breathing or meditation. Relaxing activities can help ease into a restful night's sleep.

"Making small changes in your daily habits can make a big difference in your sleep quality and overall health. Instead of turning on the TV to help you fall asleep, try reading a book or journaling about your day. Putting your phone in another room can also prevent the temptation to scroll in bed," Kapoor said. "Implementing these small habits now can help you prepare for the upcoming daylight saving time change and ensure your sleep patterns are strong and more likely to remain consistent all year long."

Provided by American Heart Association

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