

Daylight saving time adds stress to the sleep-deprived, says UB sleep medicine physician

10 March 2014, by Ellen Goldbaum

Most people are only slightly affected by the switch to daylight saving time, which goes into effect Sunday at 2:00 a.m. But for a substantial part of the population, the adjustment can be a rough period, lasting as long as a week. Daylight saving time is also correlated with increases in some accidents and the incidence of heart attacks.

"Daylight saving time is an issue because many individuals are already chronically sleep deprived," says [sleep medicine](#) expert Eric Ten Brock, MD, professor of medicine at the University at Buffalo School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. "Daylight saving time adds another stress, accentuating their [sleep deprivation](#) in the short term."

Ten Brock, who directs the UB sleep medicine fellowship, is one of New York State's few sleep physicians certified in behavioral sleep medicine. He sees patients for a broad range of [sleep disturbances](#) at the UBMD Sleep Center and at affiliated UB clinics.

"Night owls in particular, who go to sleep later anyway, are especially vulnerable," he says.

And the result is not just that folks feel more tired and then get over it.

"For a few days after [daylight saving time](#) begins, the incidence of car accidents and workplace accidents has been shown to increase by about 6 percent," he says. "There is also a small but documentable increase in myocardial infarction during the first few days after it begins. That increase is believed to be caused by the increase in pro-inflammatory cytokines that contribute to [myocardial infarction](#). Daylight saving time just increases the risk."

Ten Brock says people can help ameliorate the negative effects.

"Ease into daylight saving time," he suggests. "A few days before, start going to bed a little earlier and rising a little earlier to start making the adjustment more gradually."

He also stresses that exposure to bright light is a key factor in making the adjustment.

"Make sure to get early morning sunlight, or bright light, and then avoid bright lights later in the evening," he says. "Exposure to bright lights is the strongest signal that makes your body want to stay awake, so it's a good idea to start dimming lights in your house in the evening. If you wake up in the middle of the night and you need a light on, don't turn on a [bright light](#), use a dim nightlight instead."

Provided by University at Buffalo

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