

WAKE-UP CALL ON THE IMPORTANCE OF SLEEP.

BY JEANETTA C. RAINS, PHD

As our clocks “spring forward” for Daylight Savings Time, most Americans lose an hour of sleep until our internal body clocks can re-adjust to the external clock change. Our bodies can adjust to this one-hour time change within a few days. But during those few days, most of us can actually feel the effects of sleep loss.

The one-hour time change has some obvious and some not-so-obvious consequences. Getting up an hour earlier than usual on Monday morning leaves most of us feeling tired and maybe a little cranky—watch your coworkers and just see if they are as cheerful Monday, after the time change. This sleep loss not only makes us feel lousy, but also results in a measurable increase in the rate of traffic accidents. Researchers in several countries that participate in Daylight Savings Time (e.g., US, Canada, Britain, Sweden) have consistently demonstrated an increase in accidents for several days after the Spring time change.

The time change alone does not cause accidents; it merely aggravates an existing problem. Most individuals in America and other industrialized countries are already sleep-deprived. Work, home and family lives are busier than ever. The average adult needs 8 to 9 hours of sleep every 24-hour period in order to feel and function his/her best. However, the average American actually sleeps less than 7 hours per day.

Specific high-risk groups for sleepiness-related accidents include those with untreated sleep disorders (such as snoring and sleep apnea, insomnia, narcolepsy), shift-workers, commercial drivers, young people under the age of 25, and others who are chronically sleep deprived. Make sleep a priority and never drive drowsy.

Synchronize your biological clock daily. Go to bed at a set time each night and get up at the same time each morning. Consistent bedtimes and wake-up times

reinforce the regular rhythm of your body clock. “Sleeping in” on weekends makes it harder to wake up early on Monday morning because it re-sets your sleep cycles for a later awakening.

Find time to wind down at night by reading, taking a warm bath, or other relaxing routines that can make it easier to fall asleep. Sometimes, our best efforts to maintain good sleep and wake habits do not solve the problems. If you have persistent problems falling asleep or feeling tired the next day, this can be a sign of a sleep disorder.

If your child or bed partners are keeping you awake with their snoring, breathing pauses during sleep, problems with sleeping at night, difficulty staying awake during the daytime, unexplained decrease in daytime performance, then it's time to discuss these symptoms with their healthcare provider.

There are many treatments for sleep disorders; some may include the use of a simple medical device, medication, lifestyle changes, or corrective surgery. The goal is to restore the natural balance of sleep and wake to keep you healthy and safe.

The benefits of an outpatient rehabilitation program are that patients can return to their normal activities much

sooner than if they did not have outpatient rehabilitation...plus they will be healthier and fit than before their injury or problem occurred.

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