

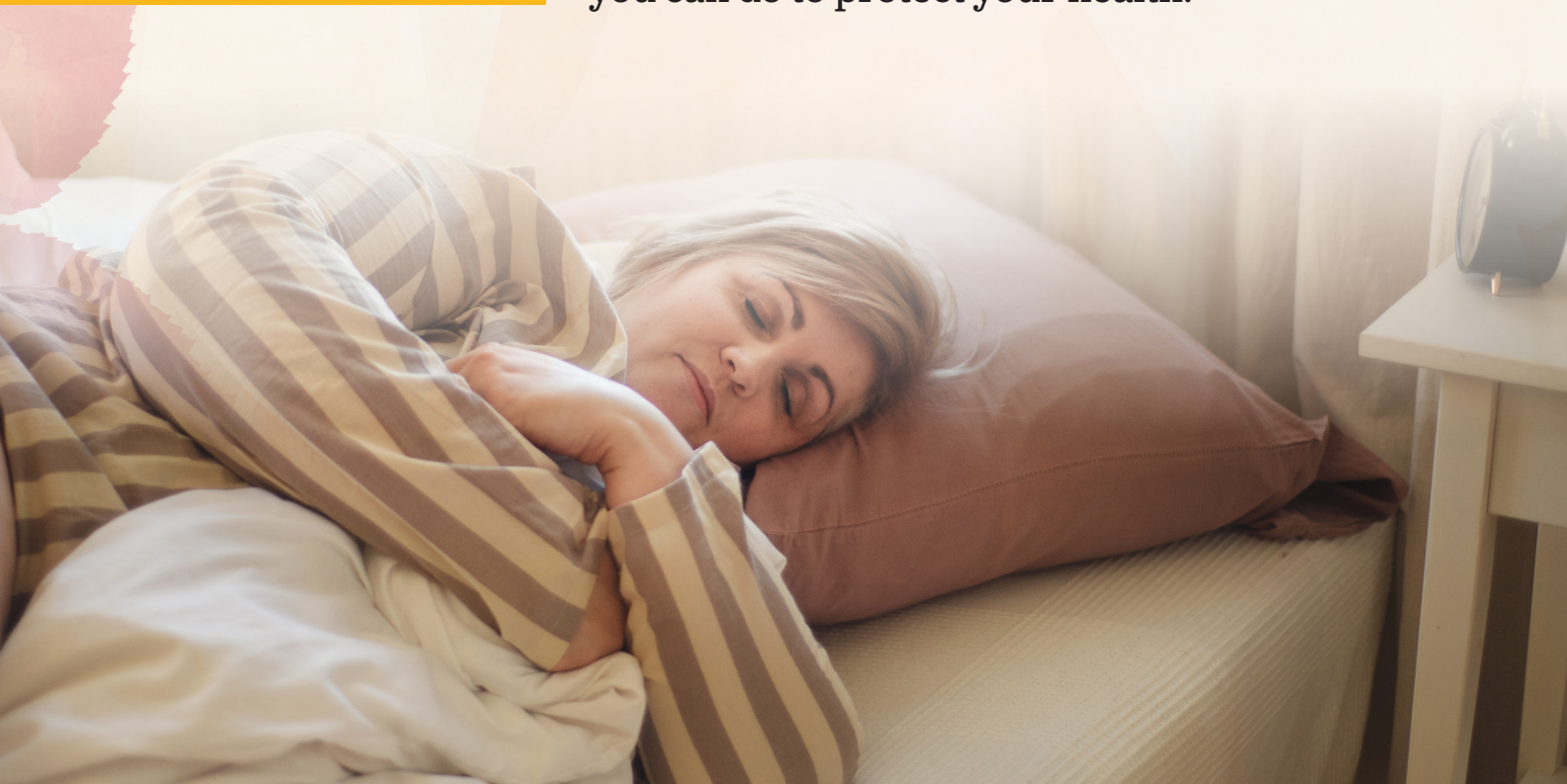


Fall Back Without Falling Off Track

by Chinyelu E. Oraedu, MD

“That one-hour change is like a mild case of jet lag.”

Every fall, millions of people around the world “fall back” by turning their clocks back one hour for daylight saving time (DST). While it may seem like we’re gaining an extra hour of sleep, the truth is these shifts can throw our bodies out of balance. This article explores how clock changes affect sleep, eating habits, mood and weight—and what you can do to protect your health.

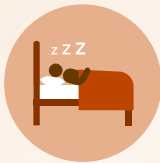


Your Body's Internal Clock

Your body runs on a natural schedule called the circadian rhythm. This “internal clock” controls sleep, hunger, body temperature and even hormone release. It's guided by light and dark, helping you know when to wake up, eat and rest. When the time suddenly shifts, your body doesn't catch up right away. That one-hour change is like a mild case of jet lag. It can affect everything from how well you sleep to how hungry you feel.

What Happens after We “Fall Back”?

Even though it may feel like we gain an extra hour of sleep, the fall time change often brings hidden challenges. In the days that follow, many people experience irritability, mood swings and trouble concentrating. Studies have even shown a spike in heart attacks right after the shift. Over the long term, the disruption to the body's natural rhythm can increase the risk of health issues such as high blood pressure, diabetes and heart disease. Poor sleep weakens the immune system as well, making it harder to fight off illness. And for some, the adjustment never fully happens, leaving them caught in a cycle of “biological jet lag” twice a year.



Sleep Takes a Hit

Sleep is often the first thing to be disrupted after the clocks change. Many people struggle to fall asleep at their new bedtime because their bodies are still tuned to the old schedule. Nights may bring more frequent awakenings, leaving sleep lighter and less refreshing. Mornings can feel especially rough, with grogginess and daytime fatigue lasting a week or more. Poor sleep doesn't just leave us tired—it ripples into other parts of life, affecting how we eat, how active we are and how well we manage stress.



How Eating Habits Shift

The fall time change stretches evenings by an extra hour, which often leads to later dinners and more nighttime snacking—especially on quick, processed foods. At the same time, people tend to skip gym visits or reduce activity, creating a perfect setup for gradual weight gain. Eating late in the evening can make this even harder to manage. As the night goes on, the body's metabolism slows, so calories are burned less efficiently. Hormones that control hunger and fullness, like leptin and ghrelin, also get disrupted, which can increase cravings and overeating. Even the gut's natural rhythms are affected, shifting in ways that encourage the body to store more fat.



Mental Health and Mood

Time changes don't just affect the body—they can affect emotions too. Research shows higher rates of depression and low mood in the weeks after the fall transition. Stress and fatigue often lead to “comfort eating” of foods high in sugar or fat. At the same time, the body releases more cortisol (the stress hormone), which makes it easier to store belly fat and harder to manage blood sugar.

Tips to Stay on Track

The good news: there are simple ways to protect your sleep, mood and weight during this transition.

Before the Change

- Shift your bedtime by 15–20 minutes each night the week before.

Morning After

- Get outside into the daylight to reset your body clock. If it's dark, consider a light therapy lamp.

For Better Sleep

- Keep a steady sleep schedule—even on weekends.
- Make your room dark, cool and quiet.
- Avoid caffeine after noon and alcohol before bed.
- If you need to nap, keep it under 30 minutes and before 3 PM.

For Healthy Eating

- Plan meals and snacks ahead of time.
- Try to finish dinner by 7 PM.
- Add protein to breakfast for better energy and fewer cravings.
- Keep pre-portioned healthy snacks on hand for evenings.

For Stress and Mood

- Use relaxation techniques like deep breathing before bed.
- Stay connected with friends and family.
- If mood changes last, talk with your healthcare provider.



!! Poor sleep doesn't just leave us tired—it ripples into other parts of life. !!

Living Well through the Time Change

Daylight saving time changes may seem small, but they have real effects on sleep, eating and overall health. With some planning and healthy routines, you can ease the transition and keep your body clock—and your well-being—on track.

About the Author:

Dr. Chinyelu E. Oraedu, MD, is an Academic Hospitalist-Nocturnist at Stamford Hospital, a teaching affiliate of Columbia University Irving Medical Center. She also serves as an Adjunct Professor at Quinnipiac University's Frank H. Netter MD School of Medicine, mentoring future physicians. As founder of Dr. Yel'Ora, a Lifestyle & Obesity Coaching Program for Night Shift Workers, she focuses on circadian rhythm, metabolic health and well-being. Learn more at [Dryelora.com](https://dryelora.com)



ABOUT THE OBESITY ACTION COALITION (OAC)

The Obesity Action Coalition (OAC) is a National non-profit organization dedicated to giving a voice to individuals affected by obesity and helping them along their journey toward better health. Our core focuses are to elevate the conversation of weight and its impact on health, improve access to obesity care, provide science-based education on obesity and its treatments, and fight to eliminate weight bias and discrimination.



VIBRANT COMMUNITY



NATIONAL AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS



ANNUAL CONVENTION



ADVOCACY



PUBLIC EDUCATION

LEARN, CONNECT, ENGAGE

The OAC knows that the journey with weight can be challenging but we also know that great things happen when we learn, connect and engage. That is why the OAC Community exists. Our Community is designed to provide quality education, ongoing support programs, an opportunity to connect, and a place to take action on important issues.

**Through the OAC Community,
you can get access to:**

- Weight & Health Education • Community Blogs
 - Community Discussion Forum
 - Ongoing Support • Meaningful Connections
- AND MUCH MORE**



JOIN TODAY: GO TO [OBESITYACTION.ORG/JOIN](https://obesityaction.org/join)

info@obesityaction.org

(800) 717-3117 | (813) 872-7835 | Fax: (813) 873-7838



@ObesityActionCoalition

@ObesityAction