

Hello Darkness, my old friend (Print)

As Americans say goodbye to Daylight Saving Time, it can be seen as a bittersweet time.

On the one hand, you're gaining an hour of sleep. On the flip side, the days get shorter, and we say, "hello darkness my old friend."

In March 2023, health experts issued a wake-up call to Congress to make the change permanent.

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) says public health and safety would benefit from eliminating Daylight Saving Time in favor of standard time. The AASM says the switch to permanent standard time would more closely align with the body's internal clock – our circadian sleep-wake cycle – instead of disrupting the body's natural rhythm.

There is also evidence that Daylight Saving Time can take a toll on your heart, specifically increasing the risk of heart attack or stroke.

The AASM recommends getting at least seven hours of sleep before and after Daylight Saving Time begins while shifting your bedtime 15-20 minutes earlier each night before the change.

Dr. Frank Han is a cardiologist with OSF HealthCare who specializes in pediatric and adult congenital heart disease. He says poor sleeping habits can impact you negatively later in life.

"The act of waking up earlier without gradually changing your schedule can increase your stress hormones," Dr. Han says. "If added on with unusual sleep schedules, night-shift work, then years down the road it can result in different kinds of cardiovascular diseases."

Dr. Han adds it's not just your sleeping habits that can put pressure on your heart. He recommends being aware of any hereditary heart issues that run in your family and pay attention to lifestyle choices that can impact heart health.

"If that's added on to less than optimal lifestyle habits, disturbed sleep schedule, disturbed circadian rhythm and other stressors in the lifestyle like tobacco. All of those factors added together can contribute to the hardening of the heart arteries and heart artery blockages as an adult," Dr. Han says.

The Senate passed the Sunshine Protection Act in 2022. This would make Daylight Saving Time permanent in November 2023. The bill, however, is stalled in the House.