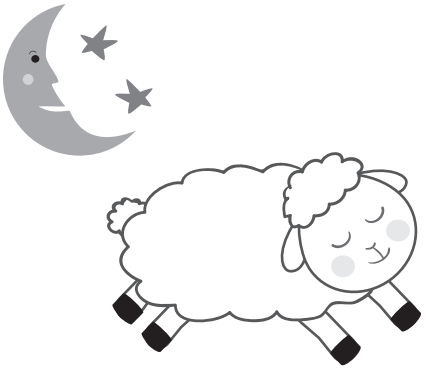

Sleep and the Time Change

Spring Forward

During the spring, the clock moves forward an hour, so we lose an hour. For adults and teenagers, this typically means losing an hour of sleep. When we get up on Monday morning at 7 a.m., we feel tired because our internal clock says it is 6 a.m. It can take some individuals weeks to feel rested again in the morning.

There is good news for the parents of young children who wake too early: often the child starts sleeping later in the morning. For a child who has been going to bed at 7 p.m. and rising at 6 a.m., this is the perfect opportunity for the parent to change the child's sleep schedule if a 7 a.m. rise time is desired. The parent must be ready, however, right from the first night after the time change to consistently put the child to bed at 8 p.m.; keep in mind, his or her internal clock will say it is 7 p.m.

Make the child's room very dark and add white noise to the room (if there is significant noise in the home in the morning from others getting up) such as an air purifier, fan, or white noise machine, then it should be effortless for the child to sleep until 7 a.m.

When a child has been going to bed at 8 p.m. and rising at 7 a.m., he is likely to appear wide awake on Sunday night after the time change at 8 p.m. because his internal clock says it is only 7 p.m. The parent should consider allowing him to stay up until 8:45 – 9 p.m. for one to three nights. During this time, the parent may have to awaken the child in the morning between 7 and 7:30 a.m. if the parent wants the child to start going to bed at night again by 8 p.m.

Fall Back

In the fall, the clock is moved back an hour, so we gain an hour. For adults and teenagers, it often means getting an extra hour of sleep. Adding an hour to the day is easy, and most adults forget there was a time change within a few days. When we get up on Monday at 7 a.m., we feel more alert and refreshed because our internal clock says it is 8 a.m. On the other hand, some adults may not be able to sleep past 6 a.m.

When a child has had a bedtime of 8 p.m. and rises at 7 a.m., she appears tired and crabby by 7 p.m. on Sunday night following the time change because her internal clock says it is 8 p.m. The parent may decide to put the child to bed at 8 p.m. knowing the child is overtired. The next morning the child rises at 6 a.m. because her internal clock says it is 7 a.m.

Although the time change officially takes place on a Saturday night, for the child it actually begins the next evening on Sunday. The parent should stick with the "old time" all day Sunday for the child's nap. Then on Sunday evening, the parent should move to the "new time" essentially making the child stay up an hour past the usual bedtime. The parent must continue putting the child down at night at 8 p.m. for the child to make the adjustment to sleeping until 7 a.m. Most children continue waking early for several days, then intermittently for several days. After about 10 – 14 days most children are back on schedule if the parent has been consistent. It will take longer for the child to adjust if the parents have intermittently put the child to bed around 7 p.m.

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