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5 WAYS LIFE WOULD BE BETTER WITH YEAR-ROUND DAYLIGHT SAVING TIME

see [5 ways life would be better if it were always daylight saving time \(theconversation.com\)](https://theconversation.com/5-ways-life-would-be-better-if-it-were-always-daylight-saving-time)

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In [my research](#) on daylight saving time (DST), I have found that Americans don't like it when Congress messes with their clocks. In an effort to avoid the biannual clock switch in spring and fall, some well-intended critics of DST have made the mistake of suggesting that the abolition of DST (and a return to permanent standard time) would benefit society. They are wrong. DST saves lives and energy, and prevents crime. Congress should move the country to year-round DST, and if it did so, here are five ways our lives would immediately improve:

1. Lives Would Be Saved. Simply put, darkness kills – and darkness in the evening is far deadlier than darkness in the morning. The evening rush hour is twice as fatal as the morning for various reasons – far more people are on the road, more alcohol is in drivers' bloodstream, people are hurrying to get home, and more children are enjoying [outdoor, unsupervised play](#). Fatal vehicle on pedestrian crashes [skyrocket threefold](#) when the sun goes down. DST brings an extra hour of sunlight into the evening to mitigate those risks, whereas Standard Time has precisely the opposite impact by moving sunlight into the morning. A meta-study by Rutgers researchers Coate and Markowitz demonstrated that [343 lives per year](#) could be saved by moving to year-round DST; the opposite effect would occur if we imposed year-round standard time.

2. Crime Would Decrease. Darkness is also a friend of crime. Moving sunlight into the evening hours has a far greater impact on the prevention of crime (especially juvenile crime that peaks in the after-school and early evening hours) than it does in the morning. Criminals strongly prefer to do their work in the darkness of evening and night; [crime rates are dramatically lower](#) in the early morning hours, even before sunrise when it's still dark. A recent British study found that improved lighting in the evening hours could [reduce the crime rate by up to 20 percent](#). Whatever reason that criminals are late to bed and late to rise, let's take advantage of it by removing an extra (dark) evening hour from their workday.

3. Energy Would Be Saved. Energy use is reduced when the sun is out later in the evening. Many people don't know that the [original justification for the creation of DST](#) was to save energy, initially during World War I and II (when it was prioritized for our troops) and then later during the 1973 OPEC oil crisis. When the sun is out later in the evening, peak energy loads are reduced. Virtually everyone in our society is awake and using energy in the early evening hours when the sun sets, whereas a considerable portion of the population is still asleep at sunrise (and hence has significantly less demand for energy then). Having more sun in the evening requires not just less electricity to provide lighting, but [reduces the amount of oil and gas required to heat our homes and businesses](#) when people need that energy most. Under standard time, the sun rises earlier (reducing morning energy consumption), but only half of Americans are awake to be able to use it.

It was this energy-savings rationale that motivated some in California to recommend permanent DST a decade ago, when the state experienced recurrent electricity shortages and rolling brown-outs. Officials at the California Energy Commission estimated that [3.4 percent of California's winter energy usage](#) could be saved by moving to year-round DST. Similarly, DST resulted in 150,000 barrels of oil saved by the U.S. in 1973, which helped us combat the effect of OPEC's oil embargo.

4. Avoiding Clock-Switches Improves Our Health And The Economy. Critics of DST are correct about one thing: The bi-annual clock switch is bad for our health and welfare. It wreaks havoc with our sleep cycles, notably causing a [24 percent increase in heart attacks](#) in the week after we "spring forward" in March, and even an uptick during the week we "fall back" and "gain" an hour of sleep in November. If that's not bad enough, the major financial market indexes NYSE, AMEX, and NASDAQ average [negative returns](#) on the Monday trading day following both clock switches. Clearly, messing with sleep cycles twice per year has perverse second-order consequences.

But the critics of biannual clock-switching ignore one crucial, simple point: the benefits of avoiding clock-switching are also available under year-round DST. They act as if the benefits of preserving sleep cycles are available only under permanent standard time, when that proposition is of course false, and particularly when the option of standard time doesn't offer the energy or life-saving or crime-prevention effects of DST.

5. Recreation And Commerce Flourish In The Sun. Finally, recreation and commerce flourish in daylight and are hampered by evening darkness. Americans are less willing to go out and shop in the dark, and it's not very easy to catch a baseball in darkness either. These activities are far more prevalent in the early evening than they are in the early morning hours (so sunlight is not nearly as helpful then). Not surprisingly, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce as well as most outdoor recreational interests [favor extended DST](#).

6. A Counterpoint to Recent Research regarding Eastern vs. Western Portions of Time Zones. Finally, in the interests of balance and full disclosure, I wish to address the recent research purporting to show an increase in [cancer risk in western portions of time zones relative to eastern portions](#) (western portions have longer evening sun, as year-round DST would also create). This research is relatively new and may be better explained by lifestyle choices in different parts of time zones than by the proponents' theory that evening sunshine increases cancer risk by disrupting circadian rhythms. For instance, personal lifestyle choices (like diet and exercise) might be healthier in Washington, D.C. and New York City (eastern parts of the eastern time zone) than they are in Chattanooga, TN or Lexington, KY (western parts of the eastern time zone).

But even if that is not the case, [it is crucial to realize that the net benefits of evening sunshine far outweigh their costs](#). Americans make decisions all the time that increase our cancer risk (e.g., drinking soda or alcohol, smoking, or eating steak instead of broccoli), because the utility from these activities outweigh their risks. The same is true of afternoon/evening sunshine: any small, increased risk that evening sunshine creates is dwarfed by the benefits of living life during the early evening in more sunshine. "Primetime" is 8 p.m., not 5 a.m., for a reason – it is futile to ask us to "just wake up earlier" to take advantage of the morning sun. It is true that we could all wake up at sunrise (which would be a jolting 4:24 a.m.(!) in New York City during summer if standard time were imposed year round), but very few Americans are going to do that. Please don't fight human nature; instead recognize that by transferring an hour of sunlight into the portion of day when ~99% of Americans are awake and moving about, we are creating far greater benefit than an extra hour of sunshine would offer in the early morning (when ~50% of Americans are still in bed). [As Ben Franklin implored centuries ago, please don't "waste an hour of sunlight"](#) by imposing year-round standard time – half of Americans will just sleep through it.

Again and again, research has shown that sunlight is far more important to Americans' health, efficiency and safety in the early evening than it is in the early morning. That's not to say there aren't downsides to DST (notably an extra hour of morning darkness). But on net, when all of the costs and benefits are balanced, the advantages of extended DST far outweigh those of standard time. It is past time that we set our clocks forward forever, and never have to switch them again.