

Do we still need daylight saving time?

Everyone is weighing in on the debate.



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For nearly a century, Americans have been springing forward and falling back, and this year will be no different. Daylight saving time (DST) is the seasonal surprise that borrows an hour from our circadian rhythm in the spring and gives it back in the fall.

But whether or not we should disrupt the rhythm at all has spurred passionate debate from many disparate groups.

To better understand the situation, it's best to look at why we do these annual clock changes. Agrarian cultures built their societies around sunlight, waking up with the sun to toil in the field and heading home as the sun lowered beneath the horizon. But the industrial revolution brought with it the freedom to unshackle us from nature's clock.

As long ago as 1897, countries around the world began instituting daylight saving time, adding an hour of sunlight to the afternoon. This meant communities could be more productive — people could work longer, and when work was done it was still bright enough to run errands and stimulate the economy. The added daylight also meant more exposure to vitamin D and the added time for people to exercise outdoors.

Everyone from factory owners to retailers embraced the change. Even the candy lobby supported the new system, figuring the extra hour of sunlight meant it would be safer for kids to go trick-or-treating on Halloween.

"It has several technical benefits as well," Dr. David Prerau, author of "[Seize the Daylight: The Curious and Contentious Story of Daylight Saving Time](#)," explained during a phone interview. "It's been found to reduce energy usage by doing something called load smoothing" — separating out electrical loads throughout the day to better deal with the valleys and peaks of energy usage — "and so you're going to generate energy more efficiently and therefore have less effects on pollution." A study by the U.S. Department of Transportation in the '70s showed that the country's electricity usage is cut by **1 percent each day** because of daylight saving time.

Some groups aren't fans of the time change

But not everyone is on board with resetting their clocks a couple of times a year.

U.S. Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida will introduce a bill in Congress to make Daylight Saving Time permanent for the entire nation. Called the Sunshine Protection Act of 2019, the bill would require all states and territories to permanently switch to Daylight Saving Time unless they already have, as Hawaii, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands and most of Arizona have.

"Studies have shown many benefits of a year-round Daylight Saving Time, which is why Florida's Legislature overwhelmingly voted to make it permanent last year," Rubio said in a statement, according to the [Orlando Sentinel](#). "Reflecting the will of the state of Florida, I'm proud to reintroduce this bill to make Daylight Saving Time permanent nationally."

In March 2018, Florida lawmakers approved a bill to make Daylight Saving Time year-round. The state House voted 103-11 and state Senate 33-2 in favor of the bill. Gov. Rick Scott signed it into law, but the clocks still rolled back an hour in November. Washington state, which in April 2019 passed its own [#DitchTheSwitch](#) legislation will have a similar experience. Why? Congress must approve the bill because of the 1966 Uniform Time Act, which "promote[s] the adoption and observance of uniform time within the standard time zones" unless a state exempt themselves from Daylight Saving Time. Rubio hopes that change that.

The U.S. isn't alone in debating whether or not Daylight Saving Time should still exist.

What Europe does

In March 2019, the European Union Commission voted to abolish daylight saving time by 2021, after **84 percent of EU citizens supported ending DST** in a public survey. The proposal needs the support of at least 28 member nations and members of the European Parliament to become law. [Under the proposal](#) each member state would decide whether to remain on DST, letting the EU commission know of their decision by 2020.

Greece, Portugal and the U.K. have expressed a desire to stay on the current system of switching back and forth, while many other member states want to end it, [reports Deutsche Welle](#). Some states are requesting a transition period until 2021.

"You need time to give the member states the opportunity to coordinate. It is really important that we don't have a total patchwork," German MEP Peter Liese told Deutsche Welle.

But does it save energy?

Other groups say Daylight Saving Time doesn't actually conserve energy.

Michael Downing, a teacher at Tufts University and the author of "Spring Forward: The Annual Madness of Daylight Saving Time," says **messing with the clock doesn't really save energy.** "Daylight saving is still a boon to purveyors of barbecue grills, sports and recreation equipment and the petroleum industry, as gasoline consumption increases every time we increase the length of the daylight saving period," Downing tells MNN. "Give Americans an extra hour of after-dinner daylight, and they will go to the ballpark or the mall — but they won't walk there."

Daylight saving time increases gasoline consumption, according to Downing. "It is a convenient and cynical substitute for a real energy conservation policy."

There's data to back him up. A [report by the California Energy Commission's Demand Analysis Office](#) concluded that, "The extension of daylight saving time (DST) to March 2007 had little or no effect on energy consumption in California."

Television networks aren't fans of the time change either. The extra hour of daylight means fewer people are home to watch TV. Viewership ratings traditionally plunge each spring. On average, primetime shows shed 10 percent of their viewers on the Monday after the clocks are changed.

"I think television networks would like it to be dark as soon as you left the office and headed home for the night," Bill Gorman, of the website TV by the Numbers, [told NPR](#). "And maybe it started raining or snowing a lot as soon as primetime began."

And it doesn't look like those issues will end anytime soon. As part of the Energy Policy Act of 2005, Congress pushed daylight saving time three to four weeks deeper into the fall.

That change has resulted in sunrises as late as 8:30 a.m. in some areas, causing ripple effects in unexpected places. For example, it has thrown a wrench into the lifestyle of observant Jews whose morning synagogue services are predicated on the sun. In fact, Prerau points out, Israel has a relatively short daylight saving time compared to other countries. "If sunrise is late, religious Jews have to delay going to work or pray at work, neither of which is a desirable situation," he says.

Alternatives for living a DST-free life

"If you don't like daylight saving time, you have plenty of options," explains A.J. Jacobs, the best-selling author of "The Know-It-All." He suggests moving to Arizona or Hawaii. "Parts of Indiana used to be DST-resistant as well, but I think they've since buckled."

Even for those who do live in such states, it's not all easy living. "It's crazy. People forget about us not changing so they call at ridiculous times," says Anita Atwell Seate, a doctoral student at the University of Arizona in Tucson. "But on the upside, you don't have to adjust your sleep schedule or your clocks."

Is daylight saving time a fait accompli or will time ever just stand still? Downing doesn't see a light at the end of the tunnel. "Since 1966, every 20 years, Congress has given us another month of daylight saving. We're up to eight months now," he says. "And there is every reason to believe that the [U.S.] Chamber of Commerce, the national lobby for convenience stores — which account for more than 80 percent of all gasoline sales in the country — and Congress will continue to press for extensions until we adopt year-round daylight saving. And then, why not spring forward in March or April and enjoy double daylight saving time?"

Editor's note: This article has been updated since it was originally published in October 2015.