

Keys to a Healthy Fall Season

Autumn is a time to enjoy breathtaking fall colors and the beginning of cooler, shorter days after what was hopefully a fun and healthy summer. For many, October in particular means football, Halloween and the final weeks of daylight-saving time.

As the leaves change and temperatures drop, it's an ideal time to prepare for the time change and consider tips to maintain our overall well-being.

Small tweak, worse sleep

In early November, most of the United States turns the clock back one hour for DST. While it may seem insignificant, it can lead to disrupted sleep patterns, mood swings and decreased productivity. To mitigate these effects, it's crucial to prepare for the change by:

- **Being mindful of sleep hygiene.** Getting good sleep is one of the three pillars for good mental health. So regardless of when you go to bed and wake up, block off seven to eight hours per night. You may want to take advantage of shorter and darker autumn days by going to bed earlier. Quiet, cool and dark conditions are important for restful sleep, as is avoiding caffeine and limiting screen time in the evening. Consider establishing a relaxing bedtime routine, such as reading a book or practicing gentle stretches to signal to your body it's time to wind down.
- **Getting plenty of light.** Since the days are shorter, be sure to take advantage of the sun while you can! Sunlight exposure and exercise boost serotonin, a mood-lifting neurotransmitter. Light also regulates your internal body clock and circadian rhythms. Natural daylight in particular helps you feel alert, with your circadian clock being more receptive to natural morning light. If possible, try to spend at least 30 minutes outdoors during daylight hours, even on cloudy days. This can help regulate your sleep cycle and improve your overall mood.
- **Staying on schedule.** To prepare for DST, be sure to set your clocks back an hour before you go to bed so you're prepared for the following day and adjust to the new time quicker. After all, no one likes to start the day running behind and rushing around in a frenzy. Avoid using the shorter fall days as an excuse to skip workouts. Since nighttime workouts can interfere with sound sleep, try transitioning to morning ones instead, even if it's just a brisk walk. Maintaining a consistent schedule for meals, exercise and sleep can help your body adjust more easily to the time change.

3 Pillars of Good Mental Health

- **Getting Quality Sleep**
- **Eating a Nutritious Diet**
- **Engaging in Regular Exercise**