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On Behalf
Of:

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Daylight Reality Check

Can a fixed clock-setting scheme give us a biologically “correct” relationship to the sun? No! Running the world by clock has a different goal, and that is to synchronize our schedules for social purposes.

From summer to winter, from the equator to the arctic, there are huge variations in amounts of daily light. Many people experience almost no seasonal variations, and many people swing from sunless days to darkless nights, year after year.

Time zones often have more than an hour of daylight shift within their borders, both east to west, south to north. Most European cities are farther north than us and therefore enjoy long summer evenings without having to avail themselves of clock changing, while they deal with darker mornings in the winter. Alaska, Hawaii and Iceland help themselves to later sunsets by crashing the time zones to their east. Looking at a time zone map of the world is fascinating.

Despite the name, there is NOTHING inherently standard about Standard time. Until we can change the world from a sphere to a cylinder, the time of sunrise and set is not standard-izable. If we must synchronize our lives with clocks, the most biologically neutral approach is to err toward aligning our rising times with the sun, and our sleeping times with the dark. This is exactly the logic behind the twice-yearly clock change.

Sadly, some people find an hour time change to be physically difficult or even a health risk; some of whom also adapt to work schedule changes or choose to travel across time zones for business and pleasure, without a thought. This change could be softened, and the payoff is great.

Experts believe that year-round Standard time is better for our health. But could this possibly be true? Could a fixed clock setting scheme provide people at all latitudes, longitudes, seasons and work schedules with a relationship to the sun that is “correct”? This seems impossible on its face. While we have a 24 hour day and a circadian rhythm to please, daylight is never going to comply. Is there one ideal latitude where we should all live? Is there one ideal time we should all set our alarms? Should we fear air travel or a new job schedule? Inquiring mind, here.

We currently enjoy Daylight Savings Time for two-thirds of the year. Changing to Standard means we would lose 260 hours of useable daylight - most of it warm summer evenings for walks, dining al fresco, camping, paddle boarding, wine tasting. We are so lucky to have so many activities at our doorstep to enjoy after a day's work. Turning a three-hour outdoor evening into a two-hour evening, (or one hour evening into no evening) is a big bummer.

Standard Time year-round in Oregon also would have people sleeping through, (or trying to), hours of morning sun, complete with chirping birds at 3:30, in exchange for shorter (and cooler) evenings. This shortens the window for socializing and exercising and generally enjoying being alive during our enviable Oregon summers that we slogged through months of cold, dark rain for.

Would shorter summer evenings mean people venture out to restaurants less, or stay closer to home? Leave the fair sooner? Trade yard work for screen time an hour earlier every day? Would this take a toll on tourism? Mental health? Would crime have more opportunity? Would the traffic be worse coming back from the beach? No reason to find out, in my humble opinion. – S.M.