

Everyday Mysteries: Why we have daylight saving time

By Department of Energy, Department of Transportation and the U.S. Navy; adapted by Newsela staff on 03.10.17

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Technician Oleg Ryabtsev performs maintenance work on a clock in Minsk, Belarus, March 29, 2008. Clocks in Belarus will move one hour ahead at midnight March 11, 2017, ushering in seven months of daylight saving time. AP Photo/Sergei Grits

Question: Why do we have daylight saving time?

Answer: The most likely answer you will hear is that we change the clocks to help farmers have more time to work their fields. Today, the reason is mostly to save on energy, electricity and money. Does it save any? We will explain that soon, but first, comes an explanation of what it is.

How Does It Work?

By law, clocks in most areas of the United States are moved ahead one hour in the spring for the summer months, known as daylight time. Clocks are turned back an hour for the winter months. Wintertime is known as standard, or regular, time.

The dates for the beginning and end of daylight time have changed as the government passed new laws. Since 2007, daylight time begins in the United States on the second Sunday in March and ends on the first Sunday in November. On that day in March, clocks are set ahead one hour at 2 a.m. standard time. It becomes 3 a.m. daylight time. On the first Sunday in November, clocks are set back one hour at 2 a.m. daylight time. It becomes 1 a.m. standard time.

Does Everyone Change Their Clock?

Not all places in the United States follow daylight time. Hawaii and most of Arizona do not use it. Indiana adopted the use of daylight time statewide in 2006. Before that, not all of the state had used it.

Most of the Northern Hemisphere countries that observe daylight time are in Europe and North America. They are in the northern half of the globe. Parts of Iceland, Singapore, Belarus and Turkey have tried it. Russia used it under one president. Then their current president, Vladimir Putin, ended daylight saving time in 2014. People became annoyed with the late sunrises in winter.

Some nations in the Southern Hemisphere observe summer time. However, their starting and ending times are switched. Summer there occurs during the Northern Hemisphere's winter months.

Countries set their own rules for time changes.

History Of Daylight Time In U.S.

Benjamin Franklin receives credit for the idea of daylight saving. He thought of it when he woke up extra early one morning in France. His idea was to make the best use of daylight hours.

The idea has stuck around because some people think it saves energy and money. Franklin wrote a letter to the editor of the Journal of Paris newspaper in 1784. He said that France could save money on candles if they slept when it was dark and woke when it was light. Later, the light bulb was invented. People thought daylight saving would help save money on light bulbs.

Many countries adopted daylight saving during World War I to conserve coal during the war.

Starting in the 1970s, daylight saving became widely used in North America and Europe. The 1970s brought an energy crisis. Oil and gas were in short supply after conflicts in the Middle East, where much of the oil used in the United States came from.

Does Daylight Saving Time Actually Work?

This is a big question. Some studies seem to show that because people are tired while their bodies adjust to the change, their work suffers, and work accidents could go up. Other studies say that it saves lives because traveling during the hours of daylight is safer, so fewer bicyclists and runners get hurt.

Some experts say that it can cost more money. Matthew Kotchen is a Yale University professor. He did a study in 2006 in Indiana. The study found that daylight saving time brought higher power costs of \$9 million more a year. This was because people were using more heating and air conditioning. He says the effect could be greater in hotter states like Florida.

Some business owners think changing the clocks makes more money for them. People in the golf business talked to Congress in 1986. They said they wanted daylight saving time because they were able to make about an extra \$400 million a year.

Quiz

- 1 Which detail would be MOST important to include in a summary of the article?
- (A) By law, clocks in most areas of the United States are moved ahead one hour in the spring for the summer months, known as daylight time.
 - (B) The dates for the beginning and end of daylight time have changed as the government passed new laws.
 - (C) Some studies seem to show that because people are tired while their bodies adjust to the change, their work suffers, and work accidents could go up.
 - (D) Other studies say that it saves lives because traveling during the hours of daylight is safer, so fewer bicyclists and runners get hurt.
- 2 Which two of the following are MAIN ideas of the article?
- 1. *Countries and states choose if and how they will observe daylight saving time.*
 - 2. *Daylight saving time was followed during World War I in order to save on coal.*
 - 3. *Studies about the effects of daylight saving time have shown mixed results, with some showing that it is helpful and others showing that it is harmful.*
 - 4. *Many industries, such as golf, feel that daylight saving time is good for their business and helps them increase the amount of money they make each year.*
- (A) 1 and 2
 - (B) 2 and 4
 - (C) 1 and 3
 - (D) 3 and 4

- 3 Read the paragraph from the article.

Many countries adopted daylight saving during World War I to conserve coal during the war.

What does the author mean by "conserve"?

- (A) afford
 - (B) hide
 - (C) save
 - (D) use
- 4 Read the sentence from the section "History Of Daylight Time In U.S."

The 1970s brought an energy crisis.

Which phrase from the section BEST helps you understand the meaning of "energy crisis"?

- (A) daylight saving became widely used
- (B) Oil and gas were in short supply
- (C) conflicts in the Middle East
- (D) much of the oil used in the United States