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People Give Less After Daylight Saving Time Switch

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CAROL YEPES, GETTY IMAGES

While the clocks may spring forward in just a few days — March 12 — don't expect donations to charity to do the same. Researchers from the University of California at Berkeley have found that people are less generous

when they don't get enough sleep, and that translates to a 10 percent decline in money donated in the days following the switch to daylight saving time.

Eti Ben Simon was the lead researcher on a [study, published in the scientific journal *PLOS Biology*](#), that found when people don't get enough sleep, they have less desire to help others. The research demonstrated the finding in several contexts — a full night of sleep deprivation, a night of poor quality sleep, and the loss of a single hour of sleep when localities switch to daylight saving time.

“All of these studies pointed to the same result: that people are less interested in helping other people, they're less generous, following lack of sleep,” Ben Simon says.

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To figure out how an hour of sleep loss affected generosity, researchers looked at DonorsChoose giving data from 2001 to 2016 in the weeks before and after the daylight saving time change — both in regions that made the switch and in those that didn't. In locales where people lost an hour of sleep, there was a 10 percent drop in the amounts donated in the following week. In places where people didn't change their clocks, including [Arizona](#) and [Hawaii](#), there was no change in donation levels.

The researchers also looked at the return to standard time in the fall, when people have the option of getting an extra hour of sleep. The results: “We don't really see a significant effect of standard time because people don't consistently get that extra hour of sleep,” Ben Simon says.

What This Means for Fundraisers

So if donors are giving less when they lose an hour of sleep springing forward, what should fundraisers do with this information? There are a few approaches.

It's good for fundraisers to have this kind of information in their arsenal, says David Hessekiel, president of the Peer-to-Peer Professional Forum, which brings together fundraisers who run walkathons and similar events.

“We’re always looking for elements that can provide a little edge or help you avoid costly mistakes,” he says. “Since the decline is for a relatively short period, I would think that one solution would be to hold off on doing a lot of outreach during that period.”

Kari Bodell, vice president of development at Susan G. Komen, thinks, like anything in fundraising, it’s hard to take a blanket approach with information like this. “It really depends on what you’ve got going on at the time,” she says. Someone in the midst of a fundraising push may need to keep going, while others can pull back.

Marshall Levin, chief philanthropy officer at the JCC Association of North America, says that he wouldn’t be deterred by the time change and instead would remind potential donors of the value of giving. “That is not a time to pull away,” Levin says. “I would come at it from a positive point of view.”

And while the impact of sleep loss on giving was clear in the research, what happens when people return to standard time wasn’t. Ben Simon’s research didn’t show increased giving with the opportunity to sleep extra, but that doesn’t mean people wouldn’t be more generous if asked. Her research compared actual giving results, rather than looking at whether targeted campaigns during that time got better results. Ben Simon says fundraisers may want to consider testing whether people targeted at this time are more generous.

“They can try reaching out to people more then,” she says. “It’s worth a shot.”

It’s Not Just About Donors

It’s natural for nonprofits to think about how a lack of generosity affects donors, but Ben Simon says to remember that the sleep loss that comes with the spring clock change affects everyone, including fundraisers.

The data shows people who have slept less are less kind to everyone — whether it’s people they know and love or strangers. She recommends remembering that in the days after the time switch.

“Try to be just extra kind because you have to compensate for that innate kindness we all have that is probably hampered by lack of sleep,” Ben Simon says.

Related research shows how sleep loss can affect people in social situations. Ben Simon says in that study, participants interacted with a variety of people who had experienced various levels of sleep the previous evening and then rated them, without knowing anything about the people’s sleep history.

“We saw that sleep-deprived individuals are considered less interesting socially to interact with or to collaborate with by anonymous raters that didn’t even know that they were working or talking to someone

who is sleep deprived,” Ben Simon says. “So, all around, for the people that ask for money and the people that give money, sleep is very important.”

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Rasheeda Childress is the senior editor for fundraising at the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, where she helps guide coverage of the field.

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