Scientists suggest new 'natural' way to reset your body clock to prepare for Daylight Saving Time

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

Eating Melatonin-rich Cherries May Help Regulate Your Internal Time Clock After 'Losing' an Hour of Sleep

Our clocks may spring forward on March 11, but our body's internal time clocks often take longer to adjust. Experts say we may find help with a surprising source of melatonin: cherries.

Melatonin is produced naturally by the body in small amounts and helps regulate your sleep-wake cycle -- helping to induce sleepiness at night and wakefulness during the day. Recent studies have revealed that tart cherries are one of the few known food sources of melatonin. Tart cherries are the variety of cherries that are sold year-round as dried, frozen and juice.

"Even a slight increase in the melatonin level in the body can improve the body's circadian rhythm or sleep patterns," said Russel J. Reiter, Ph.D, a nutrition researcher at the University of Texas Health Science Center and one of the world's leading authorities on melatonin. Reiter also is co-author of the book "Melatonin" (Bantam). "We've learned that melatonin from food enters the bloodstream and binds to sites in the brain where it helps restore the body's natural levels of melatonin, which can help enhance the natural sleep process," said Reiter.

Beyond the benefits of resetting the body's internal time clock when we change our clocks, melatonin also may be helpful for treating jet lag for international travelers, for new parents who are up all night and for late-shift workers trying to adjust to a new schedule. Increasing melatonin also has been shown to help with sleep-onset insomnia in older adults with a melatonin deficiency.

"By age 30, blood levels of melatonin begin to decline and by age 60, levels can be significantly lower, which may account for the sleep disturbances that often occur with aging," Reiter said. "If eaten regularly, tart cherries may help regulate the body's natural sleep cycle and increase sleep efficiency, including decreasing the time it takes to fall asleep."

Melatonin supplement pills have been heavily promoted in health food stores, pharmacies and on the internet as a sleep aid. But Reiter and other experts suggest food sources of melatonin, such as cherries, may be a better alternative for boosting the body's own supply of melatonin.

Research conducted by Reiter and colleagues at the University of Texas Health Science Center found that a handful of cherries contain more melatonin than what is normally found in the blood. Cherries are believed to be one of the most concentrated sources of melatonin. Bananas, corn and oats supply melatonin but in

considerably smaller amounts.

Increasing melatonin may do more than promote a restful sleep. Melatonin is a potent antioxidant that has been extensively studied in recent years for its role in reducing inflammation and fighting free radicals in the body, which is linked to increased cancer risk.

A new study published in the journal Free Radical Research that was conducted by Reiter and colleagues at the University of Granada in Spain found that melatonin neutralizes the oxidative and inflammation process caused by aging, thereby suggesting that melatonin may play a role in delaying the effects of aging.

Based on the findings of this study, the authors suggest that daily melatonin intake in humans from the age of 30 or 40 could potentially help delay illnesses related to aging.

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