

The Yellow Emperor vs. Benjamin Franklin

“Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.”
Benjamin Franklin (1706 - 1790)

One of the founding fathers of America, Benjamin Franklin was a diplomat, inventor, scientist, politician, and author. His quote above certainly captured the essence of the American spirit, praised the values of hard work and perseverance. And it reflected the hearts of the first generation of immigrants from all over the world who left behind the comfort of home for America searching for adventure, prosperity, and new dreams. With no doubt for “wealthy and wise”, however, could “early to bed and early to rise” really make a man *healthy*? The Yellow Emperor hadn’t agreed.



The Yellow Emperor (2697BC -- 2597BC), the legendary Chinese emperor lived about five thousand years ago, was the main focus of the book “Huangdi Neijing” or “the Yellow Emperor’s Internal Medicine”. The original 18-volume publications in the Han Dynasty (206BC – 220AD) were one of the most important ancient texts in the history of Chinese medicine, and still are today. The books were written as the dialogue between the Yellow Emperor and his physician Qibo. According to the texts, the universe was composed of various forces and principles, such as Yin and Yang energy. The balance and harmony with nature in lifestyle was the focal point in the well-being of Chinese people.

The table below summarizes the Yellow Emperor’s rules of bed and rise time, the idea behind this regulation is to let your body to be in tune with the season. Obviously by the standard of ancient Chinese, Benjamin Franklin was right only 25% of the time!

Seasons		Schedules
Spring	Yang	Late to bed, early to rise,
Summer	Yang	Late to bed, early to rise,
Fall	Yin	Early to bed, early to rise,
Winter	Yin	Early to bed, late to rise,

Yin and Yang represent the two opposite forces of the vital energy. Yang (like fire) energy, moving outward and upward, is the driving force for action and survival; the Yin (like water) energy, moving inward and downward, is the calming force for yielding and restoration. The Sun is the major source of the Yang 阳 energy and the Moon the Yin 阴 energy. The Yang energy is on the rise during the spring time and reaches its peak in the summer months, therefore, it only makes sense to stay up for as long as the day goes, a logical and convenient way to soak up the Yang energy from the Sun. Therefore,

getting up early and staying up late during the warm weather seasons act up the vital energy within our body. Keeping up this schedule will make you healthy.

On the contrary, as the day grows shorter and night longer, the Yang energy loses its supremacy, the Yin energy ascends. Transiting from the action-packed Yang summer to the calming Yin months, the ancient Chinese prefer to “early to bed and early to rise” in the fall. The winter months, the animals hibernating, the solar energy at its weakest, are the ideal time for storage; by switching to the mode of rest, our body can recoup and get ready for the action of the next spring. Therefore, the best bed-time schedule for winter is “early to bed and late to rise”. Ask yourself, do you feel refreshed after the extra hour of sleep from the school delay in the last two months of snowy weather? How about lazy mornings at the weekends during cold winter months?

The problem with the modern world is that we don’t pay attention to the change of nature as much as the ancient people. The by-products of our modern comfort, such as the air conditioner and the heater, are often the muteness of our senses and eventually disturbance of our internal rhythms. No wonder we are unable to fall asleep when it is time to sleep and can’t get up when it is time to work! Keeping our body in harmony with the natural rhythms may be the solution for insomnia, indigestion, and many other ailments.



vs



The Yellow Emperor

Benjamin Franklin

If the Yellow Emperor were still alive today, he would be the first to take against day-light-saving time, another idea of Benjamin Franklin (sorry Ben, don’t take it personally). With the change of day length, our internal clock makes adjustment to align with the change of the nature. Artificially shifting the clock ahead or back an hour, without a doubt, creates unnecessary stress to our body’s inner rhythm. What happened last time the switch of day-light-saving occurred: fatigue, headache, even mood swings? Remember your own symptoms, and then it shouldn’t be hard to cast your vote - the Yellow Emperor versus Benjamin Franklin.