Weightlessness no cure for "morning clumsies," astronaut says

Irene Klotz, Reuters

(Reuters) - Like many people, Canadian astronaut Chris Hadfield confesses that he's sometimes clumsy in the morning just after waking up.

The three-time astronaut, now living aboard the International Space Station, was surprised to learn that did not change in the weightless environment of space.

"When I come out of my sleeping berth to go into our galley and our bathroom, I bump into things even though I'm floating weightless," the 53-year-old pilot told reporters during an in-flight press conference on Thursday.

"You can still have the morning clumsies up here and that surprised me," said Hadfield, who is in line to become the first Canadian commander of the orbital outpost in March.

Hadfield has been sharing his experiences in orbit with a growing flock of Twitter followers. His "Cmdr_Hadfield" Twitter account has added more than 130,000 new subscribers since the astronaut blasted off on December 19 for a six-month stay on the station.

"What we're doing on the space station is fundamentally fascinating ... It encapsulates where we are in history, with people permanently living off Earth. With these new technologies and communications, we can directly give people the human side of that," said Hadfield, who now has more than 163,000 followers.

In between Twitter posts about false fire alarms and fixing the station's toilet, Hadfield has been sharing photographs taken from his unique vantage point 250 miles above Earth.

His favorite subject so far has been so-called noctilucent, or "night shining" clouds that form at the outermost edge of Earth's atmosphere.

These tenuous patches of ice crystals are barely visible from the planet's surface, but sparkle clearly in orbit, Hadfield said.

"The light bounces off of those clouds directly into our eyes," he said.

In addition to the beautiful colors, textures and ripples, Hadfield said the clouds also are a way to monitor changes in the atmosphere and learn more about how the atmosphere interacts with space.

That vantage point from orbit extends beyond visual perception, he added.

"The world just unrolls itself for you, and you see it absolutely discretely as one place. It's hard to reconcile the inherent patience and beauty of the world with the terrible things that we can do to each other as people and can do to the Earth itself," Hadfield said.

"With increased communication, with increased understanding comes a more global perspective and it's one that we feel incredibly honored to see directly and one that we do our best to try to pass on to everybody," he said.

(Editing by Tom Brown and Dan Grebler)

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