



## **JET LAG**

Jet lag typically affects those on long haul flights (over 5 hours). Shorter flights (2/4 hours) don't appear to have the same effect. Whether you are a regular 'flier' accumulating thousands of Frequent Flier Miles, or someone who likes an annual holiday in a distant location, you are likely to have experienced jet lag, which can have a profound effect on your sleep and alertness.

Every day, millions of travellers struggle against one of the most common sleep disorders — jet lag. Up until fairly recently, jet lag was considered merely a state of mind. Now, studies have shown that the condition results from an imbalance in our body's natural "biological clock" caused by traveling through different time zones. Basically, our bodies work on a cycle called "circadian rhythms." These rhythms are measured by the distinct rise and fall of body temperature, plasma levels of certain hormones and other biological conditions. All of these are influenced by our exposure to sunlight and help determine when we sleep and when we wake.

When traveling to a new time zone, our circadian rhythms are slow to adjust and remain on their original biological schedule for several days. This results in our bodies telling us it is time to sleep, when it's actually the middle of the afternoon, or it makes us want to stay awake when it is late at night. This experience is known as jet lag.

## **TREATMENT**

Some simple behavioural adjustments before, during and after arrival at your destination can help minimize some of the side effects of jet lag.

Select a flight that arrives at your destination in the early evening.

Anticipate the time change for trips by getting up and going to bed earlier several days prior to an eastward trip and later for a westward trip.

Upon boarding the plane, change your watch to the destination time zone.

Avoid alcohol or caffeine at least three to four hours before bedtime. Both act as "stimulants" and prevent sleep.

Upon arrival at a destination, avoid heavy meals (a snack—not chocolate—is okay).

Avoid any heavy exercise close to bedtime. (Light exercise earlier in the day is fine.)

Bring earplugs and blindfolds to help dampen noise and block out unwanted light while sleeping.

Try to get outside in the sunlight whenever possible. Daylight is a powerful stimulant for regulating the biological clock. (Staying indoors worsens jet lag.)

Contrary to popular belief, the type of foods we eat have no effect on minimizing jet lag.

According to experts, stress or the potential for stress is another problem that can lead to sleeplessness. Two common travel related stress conditions are the "First Night Effect" and the "On-Call Effect." The first condition occurs when trying to sleep in a new or unfamiliar environment. The second is caused by the nagging worry that something just might wake you up, such as the possibility of a phone ringing, hallway noise or another disruption.

These tips have been suggested to avoid travel-related stress and subsequent sleeplessness:

Turn your mobile phone off

Check your room for potential sleep disturbances that may be avoided; e.g., light shining through the drapes, unwanted in-room noise, etc.

Request two wake-up calls in case you miss the first one.

## **SLEEP ENVIRONMENT**

The most common environmental elements affecting sleep are noise, sleep surface, temperature or climate, and altitude. Your age and gender also play a part in determining the level of sleep disturbance.

Noise and sleep surface are self-explanatory (hotel room or apartment located beside an elevator/night club/busy road and a strange bed)

### **Temperature/Climate**

The point at which sleep is disturbed due to temperature or climate conditions varies from person to person. Generally, temperatures above 24 degrees Celsius (75 degrees Fahrenheit) and below 13 degrees Celsius (54 degrees Fahrenheit) will awaken people.

### **Altitude**

The higher the altitude, the greater the sleep disruption. Generally, sleep disturbance becomes greater at altitudes of 13,200 feet or more. The disturbance is thought to be caused by diminished oxygen levels and accompanying changes in respiration. Most people adjust to new altitudes in approximately two to three weeks.

## **COPING**

Modifying your behaviour and taking sleeping pills are both commonly accepted measures used to minimize certain sleep disorders.

As mentioned, certain behaviours can help your body better adjust to new time zones and surroundings. Although there are no guarantees to a fast and sound sleep, simple adjustments in your behaviour when traveling may help you get the quality of rest needed to start the day refreshed.

*DISCLAIMER: While every effort is made to ensure medical accuracy, this paper should not be used to diagnose or treat a sleep disorder. In all cases the advice of a properly qualified medical practitioner should be sought.*

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