

Travelling Healthy

Jet Lag

Definition:

A disturbance of normal body rhythm (circadian rhythm or day to night schedule) caused by sudden changes in time zone of at least three hours. Jet lag is associated with rapidly travelling long distances, sometimes crossing many time zones and is generally worse when travelling east. Adults are usually effected more than children.

Signs and Symptoms:

Fatigue, vagueness/fuzziness, irrational and unreasonable behaviour (grumpy) sleep disturbances, gastro-intestinal disturbances, poor mental and physical performance.

Re-adaptation to normal functioning generally takes 1-2 hours per day and may take several days.

To Minimise Jetlag:

Pre-Flight:

Pre flight conditioning such as being fit, having a healthy diet, being relaxed and well rested will reduce the chance of experiencing jet lag. However the reality for most travellers is that their lifestyle before departure is hectic with activities such as settling accounts, organising children, pets, banking, long working hours, late nights and sometimes an excess of alcohol (going away functions) that all increase the likelihood of jet lag.

You can adjust your sleeping time pre-departure to help reduce jet lag, but again it can be difficult for most people. For example, people travelling from Australia to Europe may benefit from going to bed and getting up 1-2 hours later than usual for 2 nights pre-departure, and vice-versa for eastward travellers.

During Flight:

Avoid alcohol, caffeine and tobacco. It is estimated that one glass of alcohol in the air is worth two on the ground.

Increase your fluid intake, water is preferable, to juices carbonated drinks and mineral water.

Get regular exercise, e.g. by walking up and down the aisle hourly! It increases circulation. Eat small regular meals, avoiding rich fatty foods.

The use of short acting sleeping tablets can be helpful during flight or on arrival to help adjust the body clock/sleeping patterns. Sleeping tablets should not be used with alcohol. You need to retire within 15-30 minutes of taking the tablet. It is also a good idea to try them before you go so you know how they affect you

Wear loose comfortable clothing and footwear.

If possible try to sleep at the night time of your destination, otherwise try to sleep when it is dark outside the plane.

First class travel is associated with less jet-lag. This is due to the availability of the horizontal sleeping position. In economy class, the rear of the plane may have less passengers where you might be able to stretch out on adjacent seats.

Stop overs on long journeys reduce the incidence of jet lag. The stop over needs to be at least 24 hours duration to be of benefit

Minimise your Risk – Maximise your Travel Experience:

Arrival:

Late afternoon and evening arrivals at your destination reduce jet lag as normal sleep patterns can be achieved more quickly.

You need to adopt local time immediately on arrival if you haven't started to do so on the plane. Eat at local time and try to sleep at local time. Physical activity and exposure to light are key factors in the adjustment to local conditions. Westward travellers will benefit most from afternoon light and exercise and eastward travellers from morning light and exercise.

Keep any daytime naps to less than 45 minutes. This will reduce the “dopey” feeling that results from deep sleep and still allows you to sleep more easily at night.

A busy schedule on the same day as arrival causes fatigue and increases jet lag. After a long journey it is better to rest for at least 18-24 hours before embarking on tours, visits to tourist attractions or beginning work.

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