

AVOIDING JET LAG

What Is Jet Lag

Jet lag refers to a combination of symptoms that occur as the result of travel through three or more time zones. Everyone has an internal clock that is set to correspond with the external changes experienced in a 24-hour period; primarily relating to the day/night cycle. Traveling through several time zones can disrupt the body's internal clock; your body may think it's time to sleep even though it may be the start of a new day.

Symptoms of Jet Lag

Jet lag can affect different people in different ways. Some people have little problems with jet lag and can recover rapidly while others find jet lag to be very disruptive. Typical symptoms of jet lag include daytime sleepiness, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, headache, irritability, gastric discomfort, and trouble initiating and maintaining sleep.

Factors Contributing to Jet Lag

There are factors associated with travel that can contribute to jet lag. Traveling can be a stressful and tiring activity, causing fatigue by the time you reach your destination. Just being in a new environment can produce a feeling of disorientation. Many people find it difficult to sleep in a strange bed, and it may take a day or two to feel rested. The direction of travel can also influence the amount of jet lag experienced. Jet lag is more severe when traveling east than when flying west. It's easier for your body to extend the day rather than shorten it. Jet lag can last for several days.

Tips for Avoiding Jet Lag

- Decide whether to stay on your "home time" or adjust to your new environment.
- If possible arrive at your destination in the early evening (local time).
- Anticipate your new time zone. Sleep on the plane if arrival is in the morning and stay awake if arriving in the evening.
- Get plenty of sleep before you travel. Being rested will make the adjustment to a new time zone easier.
- If possible, start adjusting sleeping and waking times to your new time zone days before leaving on your trip. For example, if travelling west, try going to bed and getting up an hour later each day for three days before leaving. If flying east, reverse the process.
- Prevent dehydration during the flight by drinking plenty of water. Dehydration contributes to fatigue.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine during the flight.
- Exercise during the flight by stretching and walking.
- Eat several small, light meals throughout the days before, during, and just following your flight.
- Avoid using sleeping pills. They can cause a hang-over effect.
- If a nap is needed, keep it short (10 to 30 minutes) and nap only in the middle of the afternoon (local time), once you arrive at your destination.

For additional information on this and other health issues, visit: MedlinePlus.gov