

Advice Sheet - Advice on Jet Lag

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Categories: Health and Medical

No single treatment exists to combat jet lag or its effects. However, scientists who study circadian rhythms have developed useful recommendations and guidelines to help minimize the symptoms of jet lag. Some of these guidelines are more complicated than others. The information below attempts to present simplified, best practice information for travelers.

Symptoms of Jet Lag

Symptoms include insomnia, general fatigue, and impaired concentration. Travelers also report irritability, headaches, stomach and intestinal changes (including diarrhea and constipation) and occasionally, problems with coordination.

Duration of Jet Lag

Everyone responds differently to jet lag, so recovery times will vary. Some travel experts believe that westward travel is easier to adjust to than eastward travel, because the normal body rhythm adjusts better to a longer day than a shorter one. There is a general rule that it takes one day to adjust to each time zone of travel.

Treatment

- Generally, immediately adopt the time of your destination.
- Eat and sleep at the new time. If a nap is required to make it through the day, set an alarm and don't let the nap exceed one hour.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol. Alcohol makes you feel sleepy but it actually disturbs sleep.
- When awake at night, keep the lights low, read or engage in a quiet relaxing activity.
- Daytime exercise in sunlight helps the body adjust.
- If traveling east, try to get exposure to morning light and if travelling west opt for afternoon sunlight.
- If possible, plan your schedule to allow for some initial adjustment time before engaging in strenuous activities or important business meetings.

There is no conclusive evidence that melatonin, special diets, or light therapy will assist every traveler with the symptoms of jet lag. Studies have found that older travelers seem to fare better

than younger ones and that schedule adaptation as soon as is practical seems to be the best remedy. Short-acting prescription medications are available in many areas. Check with your travel health clinician to determine if your trip and medical profile may benefit from a sleep aid.

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