

How to Prevent Jet Lag



Jet travel makes it possible to reach the far corners of the world in a matter of hours. Yet crossing several time zones disrupts your body's natural rhythm of eating and sleeping. The result is a combination of fatigue, disorientation, indigestion, headaches, and insomnia, collectively called jet lag. Traveling from east to west is more of a problem than traveling west to east. Traveling north or south, if you don't change time zones, doesn't cause jet lag. It may take as long as one day per time zone for your body to adjust to changes.

Ways to prevent jet lag include the following:

- Three nights before you leave, change your bedtime. If you're traveling east, go to bed 1 hour earlier for each time zone you will cross. For example, if you usually go to bed at 10:30 p.m.; two nights before the trip, go to bed at 9:30 p.m. and the night before you leave, go to bed at 8:30 p.m. If you're traveling west, go to bed one hour later for each time zone you will cross.
- Once you are on the plane, change your watch to match the time it is where you are going. Act according to that time. For example, if it is time to sleep in the country you are going to, try to sleep on the plane. If it is daytime, do activities that keep you awake.
- When you travel east on a long flight (over many time zones), try to take an overnight flight or one that arrives at nighttime so you can sleep on the plane or when you arrive.
- Ask your doctor about using melatonin, an over-the-counter product that may help "reset" your natural awake/sleep cycle. Ask, too, about taking vitamin B12 and vitamin C supplements certain days before your flight and after you return home.
- During the flight, avoid sleeping pills, alcohol, and caffeine. Drink plenty of water or juices to avoid dehydration. The air in the aircraft is very dry.
- If you arrive at your destination during the day, plan to spend sometime outdoors. Try to expose yourself to as many hours of daylight as the number of time zones you crossed.
- Don't go to bed until evening.