

Minimize the Misery of Jet Lag

Whether flying across the country to visit family or globetrotting from Miami to Milan, when you get off the plane you may feel like you're a member of the walking dead. Welcome to jet lag, a traveler's least favorite companion.

Jet lag packs several unpleasant punches, including fatigue, [sleep disruption](#), gastrointestinal problems, and the inability to concentrate.

Blame your circadian rhythms, the physical, mental, and behavioral changes that you experience in any 24-hour period. "Because they control your sleep-wake cycle, circadian rhythms are disrupted when you cross two or more time zones. Your body acts as if it's still on your time schedule back home. Most people need a day to recover for every time zone crossed," says [Dr. Alberto Ramos](#), a sleep specialist with the University of Miami Health System.

Cabin pressure changes, flying at high altitudes, and dry air also affect some [travelers](#), even on short flights.

"There are things you can do before, during, and after travel to minimize the effects of jet lag," says Dr. Ramos.

Before your next trip, consider the strategies below.

Prior to departure:

- **Rest up.** Stockpile sleep so you don't start your journey with a sleep deficit.
- **Tweak your schedule.** If traveling east, go to bed one hour earlier for several nights before departure. Headed west? Hit the pillow one hour later for a few nights. Also, eat meals closer to the time you'll be eating at your

destination.

- **Trick your brain.** Set your watch to the new time zone when boarding your flight.

In-flight advice:

- **Hydrate.** Drink plenty of water before and during your flight – dehydration makes jet lag worse. Skip caffeine and alcohol – both cause dehydration and disrupt sleep.
- **Keep moving.** That’s easier if you book an aisle seat, but between strolls, stretch and flex your feet under the seat in front of you. This keeps circulation moving, which helps avoid blood clots.
- **Catch some ZZZs.** Some people breeze through time zones with an inflight snooze. If you’re not among them, pack an eye mask, inflatable pillow, ear plugs/headphones to help you rest, even if you can’t sleep. Caveat: Avoid sleeping if it’s daytime at your destination.

Smooth landings:

- **The early bird gets less weary.** Let your body adjust by arriving a few days before your meeting or event.
- **To nap or not to nap?** Skip the post-flight nap or power nap for one hour or less, followed by a shower.
- **Stay active.** Walking or other physical activity stimulates your circulation and may improve sleep.

Let there be light.

Get sunlight or daylight exposure in your new destination. East-bound travelers need morning light to adjust to an earlier time zone. West-bound travelers need evening light exposure to adjust to a later-than-usual time zone. These guidelines change if

you jetted through more than eight time zones. In that case, if you're flying east-bound, avoid bright morning light (wear sunglasses), but get plenty of late afternoon light. If traveling west, avoid sunlight a few hours before nightfall. You should only need to follow this routine for a few days.

Remedy the situation.

[Melatonin](#) helps some travelers readjust. If flying east, take a small dose 30 minutes before the local bedtime for a few nights. If flying west, take melatonin in the morning. Other frequent flyers swear by homeopathic herbal remedies. Unless you already take prescription sleep medicine, it's best to avoid it and over-the-counter sleep aids while traveling.

Frequent travelers who struggle with jet lag may benefit from seeing a sleep specialist. To make an appointment, call 305-243-ZZZZ or [click here](#).

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