

# Avoiding Jet Lag

---

Jet lag is the term used to describe the discomfort produced by rapid travel across multiple time zones. It results from disruption of the body's internal clock and produces symptoms such as fatigue and irritability, disturbed sleep, forgetfulness, and poor appetite.

The average traveler needs about one day to adapt for every two hours of time change, although crossing over five time zones (five hours' difference) is usually necessary before the effects become significant. Factors such as advanced age, an introverted personality, various drugs, underlying illness, and travel in a west-to-east direction will tend to prolong the time taken to adjust.

Numerous strategies have been proposed in an attempt to minimize the effects of jet lag. It is worth trying to implement any of the following that seem to work for you:

## A. Before Departure

1. For a few days before departure, begin to adjust eating and sleeping patterns to the new time zone. (If traveling eastward, go to sleep, get up and eat your meals progressively earlier; if traveling westward, go to sleep, get up, and eat your meal progressively later.)
2. Travel in an east-to-west direction whenever possible.
3. Plan the journey so as to arrive at the new destination in the early evening.
4. If possible, plan for a stopover *en route*.

## B. During Flight

1. On boarding, reset your watch to the new destination time and try to adjust eating and sleeping accordingly.
2. If you are scheduled to arrive in the morning, try to sleep during the flight. Consider the use of a short-acting hypnotic to aid sleep, but be careful, since combining some of these drugs with alcohol may produce significant memory lapses. If you are scheduled to arrive in the evening, try to stay awake during the flight.
3. Drink generous quantities of liquids, such as juices and water.
4. Limit alcohol intake to a minimum, or avoid altogether.
5. Avoid smoking.
6. Exercise regularly (e.g. walk around the plane every hour while awake.)

## Ten Guidelines for International Travel

1. **Always seek pre-travel advice before an international trip.** Even if you've traveled to the destination previously, be aware that prevailing health conditions change rapidly.
2. **Take your malaria chemoprophylaxis as prescribed.** Take the first one or two doses before leaving home. If an adverse drug reaction occurs, an alternative regimen can be prescribed. Follow your prescribed regimen faithfully during and for four weeks after your trip.
3. **Take personal precautions against insects during travel.** Many insect-transmitted diseases are not preventable by vaccine or drugs.
4. **Assemble a traveler's medical kit appropriate for your destination, length of trip and general health.**
5. **Be prepared to purify your own supply of drinking water if bottled or boiled beverages are not readily available.** Remember that ice cubes in beverages are a potential source of contamination.
6. **Take appropriate dietary precautions.** Avoid raw or uncooked foods, especially meat, seafood and salads. Also avoid food sold by street vendors. Be sure that milk, cheese, and other dairy products have been pasteurized. Select fruits and vegetables with thick skins that you can peel yourself (oranges, grapefruit, bananas, mangoes, papayas, and avocados).
7. **Do not walk barefoot outdoors, except at poolside or the beach.** Wearing appropriate footwear can prevent infection from parasites, fungi, insect bites (chigger, ticks, sand fleas) and other injuries (snakebite, cuts, puncture wounds).
8. **Do not swim, bathe, or wade in fresh water streams, rivers, or lakes, in areas endemic for schistosomiasis.** If accidental immersion in a high risk area occurs, rapidly towel-dry wet skin to decrease chances of infection.
9. **Avoid exposure to potentially contaminated body fluids.** Diabetics and other individuals at high risk should carry a personal supply of needles and syringes. Defer elective procedures such as tattoos, ear piercing and acupuncture. Do not engage in illicit intravenous drug use (which has considerable health risks and legal consequences at home as well as abroad). Follow safe sex guidelines and recognize that the safest behavior is avoiding sexual contact with anyone whose history is unknown. Devise a contingency plan for emergency medical care during travel in the event of accidental injury or serious illness.
10. **Protect yourself from accidental injury due to motor vehicle transportation (a leading cause of morbidity in travelers).** Avoid riding motorcycles, alcohol consumption when driving, and traveling in (riding in) overcrowded public vehicles (buses, trucks and taxis); request rental cars with seat belts when available.

*Keep healthy!*