



Reducing Jet Lag “Fasten your seatbelts; it’s going to be a bumpy ride.”

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Flying across time zones puts our internal circadian rhythm, or sleep/wake cycle, out of sync with our external environment. Eventually, our natural cycles will adjust, but it takes time.

While our bodies try to adapt to the new schedule, we may suffer from:

- Sleep problems: fatigue, insomnia, or nighttime awakenings
- Upset stomach
- Headaches
- Impaired judgment or difficulty concentrating
- Several factors that make jet lag more likely include:
 - Flying east (shortening the day is harder on your system than lengthening the day)
 - The number of time zones you cross
 - Low flexibility in your personal circadian rhythm (especially as you age)

Tips to reduce jet lag include:

- On short trips (one to two days), keep your local time. This means waking up and going to bed, eating, and working at the same time you would at home. Also, stay out of the sun during hours you would not be in the sun at home. This may put a crimp in your socializing, but can make a big difference if you stick to it.
- On longer trips, make the switch early. A few days before your trip you can slowly begin to move your time closer to your destination time. Each day and night make wake up and bed time an hour later or earlier depending on which way you are traveling. Also, shift mealtimes and other activities closer to destination time.
- Only sleep on the plane if it is appropriate to the schedule you are maintaining. If it is a red-eye flight sleep is very important, if not, you should try to keep yourself occupied with other activities.
- Drink plenty of water to stay hydrated. Drink water before boarding the plane and refill it for the flight. Having to get up to use the restroom will also help you stretch your muscles.
- When you arrive, if you have not yet changed to your destination time, switch over fast. Follow the schedule of the new time zone for bedtime and wake up time. This means you might be staying up and waking up later or going to bed and getting up earlier.
- If you are excessively tired during the day, take a short 20-30 minute nap in the early afternoon. Longer naps in the evening just make it harder to fall asleep that night.
- Spend time outdoors. If you have to wake up earlier than usual, early morning sun will help to keep you alert. If you have to stay up later than usual, late-afternoon sun will keep you going.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol that will disrupt sleep. Also, avoid heavy, spicy meals before bedtime that may keep you up at night.

- You also may want to pack a sleep mask and ear plugs to help facilitate a dark, quiet place for sleep.

Resource: The Harvard Medical School Guide to A Good Night's Sleep by Lawrence Epstein