



JETLAG

Jetlag refers to the physical and psychological symptoms which occur when a traveller's regular sleeping and waking cycle is altered by crossing several time zones during a single flight. Jetlag is most pronounced when there is a time change of more than five hours.

While the flight's physical stresses (mainly dehydration and immobility) can contribute to jetlag, Travelvax believes that the main contributing factors are a disturbance to the psychological circadian rhythm and to the traveller's regular sleep cycle.

Many of the body's natural functions (hormones secretion, body temperature and blood pressure) are subject to daily rhythms based on activity during daylight hours and sleeping at night. Unfortunately for long-haul international travellers, it takes time to adjust to new routines imposed by travel. When the circadian rhythm and sleep cycle are out of 'sync', travellers experience jetlag.

A high incidence of jetlag is observed in older people and those flying west to east.

For many people jetlag is more than just an inconvenience. It can be particularly disruptive for business travellers, diplomats and sportsmen, who must be physically or mentally fit on arrival. Travelvax suggests ways to mitigate the effects of jetlag below.

SYMPTOMS

- Sleep disturbance is the major and most common problem
- Other symptoms may include fatigue, disorientation, insomnia and anxiety
- There may be lack of concentration, confusion, mental exhaustion and impaired physical performance
- There may also be a loss of appetite, irritability, headaches, joint stiffness, bowel irregularities and even impaired vision
- Symptoms of motion sickness, stress and dehydration are similar to those of jetlag and can make jetlag worse.

PREVENTION

Pre-flight:

- Select flight schedules to minimise sleep deprivation
- Plan a stopover. Arrive at your destination in the late afternoon or early evening
- Avoid last-minute hectic activities before long flights
- Start eating and sleeping according to your destination schedule several days before the trip

In-flight:

- Make yourself comfortable – wear loose, unrestrictive clothing
- Select a seat in a quiet, low-traffic area, away from the galley or toilets
- Slip off shoes to aid circulation
- Drink plenty of water and fruit juices to maintain hydration
- Avoid over-eating
- Avoid drinks containing caffeine and alcohol. They cause jetlag-enhancing dehydration
- If possible, get off the plane at stopovers and walk about
- Move around the cabin at intervals during the flight
- Moisturising your face can help reduce the feeling of dehydration: refresh yourself by cleaning your teeth and changing your clothes before leaving the plane

- Adopt the local time – if possible, in advance of departure - for both eating and sleeping

Post-flight:

- Recognise the potential for jetlag and adjust your itinerary accordingly
- Adopt the local time on arrival, if you haven't already
- Stay awake until your normal bedtime of your new destination
- Try and get a good night's sleep on the first night
- If experiencing insomnia read or watch TV, but not in bed
- Don't lie down until tired
- Eating is an important time-setting mechanism. Take meals at the appropriate new time
- Get up early on the first morning
- If arriving during the day, spend some time outdoors and have a short walk as sunlight and moderate exercise may help you adjust more quickly to the new time zone
- Avoid naps until fully adjusted to the new time
- For a quick 'pick-me-up', try peppermint oil in hot water (steam inhalation) or by mixing it with a base oil and massaging the temples.

TREATMENT

There is no magic pill for jetlag. Preventing as many symptoms as possible is important in recovery, which normally takes a day for each time zone crossed. For example, for the 8-11 hour time shift encountered between the UK and Australia, it may take three days to a week to fully adjust. Medication that can assist includes:

- Mild sleeping tablet - For travellers who experience insomnia, these can help in getting to sleep.
- Melatonin - a naturally occurring hormone that is thought to regulate sleep and body rhythms – is a possible treatment. (NB. Most melatonin preparations are synthetic and of variable quality.) Currently, the dosage suggested is 3 – 5 mg melatonin (fast release) at bedtime for approximately four days after eastbound and westbound flights. In some people, melatonin can trigger sleep and help re-synchronise the body's natural rhythm to the new time zone. It could make you drowsy during waking hours so driving, piloting an aircraft and operating machinery should be avoided

More information on jet lag is available during your pre-travel consultation with Travelvax. Call 1300 360 164 for the location of the clinic nearest to you.