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## Ways to Minimize Jet Lag

Dr. Mercola | October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017

### How Air Travel Affects Your Body and Mind

Aside from jet lag, air travel can have a number of other health effects as well, including the following (see list below). Air travel is even associated with a number of psychological effects, courtesy of low oxygen levels (hypoxia), including increased anxiety, stress and other negative emotions that can make you grouchy and unfriendly.

- **Pressure in the ears** due to changes in air pressure. Chewing gum during ascent, and swallowing or yawning during descent can help equalize the pressure.
- **Headache** due to low oxygen. Prevent by drinking plenty of water and avoiding caffeine and alcohol during the flight.
- **Foot, ankle and leg swelling**, raising your risk for a blood clot, due to impaired blood flow. Prevent by standing up now and then, and flexing, rotating and extending your ankles while sitting. Compression stockings may also be helpful.
- **Dehydration** due to dry air. Prevent by drinking plenty of water before and during the flight.
- **Toothache** due to shifts in air pressure. There's no way to prevent the pain associated with the expansion of gas trapped in fillings or cavities, so see a dentist before traveling if you suspect you have a problem.
- **Fatigue, sleepiness, increased reaction times and reduced ability to make decisions** due to low oxygen.
- **Gassiness** due to shifts in cabin pressure.
- **Altered/dulled sense of taste and smell**. Taste sensitivity can be restored by staying well-hydrated.
- **Dry skin** due to dry air — a problem easily addressed with moisturizing lotion. Also, be sure to drink plenty of water.
- **Bad breath** due to dry mouth. Remedy by brushing your teeth on the plane and staying well-hydrated.
- **Decline in physical and athletic performance.**
- **Daytime sleepiness and lethargy followed by nighttime insomnia.**
- **Anxiety, irritability, confusion and poor concentration.**
- **Constipation or diarrhea**
- **Headache, nausea, indigestion, dehydration and/or general malaise**

### Minimize Jet Lag by Pretending You're Already There

As a general rule, your body will adjust to the time zone change at a rate of one time zone per day. What this means is, if you need to be at your physical or psychological best, you'd want to fly out one or more days ahead of time. If you cannot squeeze in the extra time, you could act "as if," and pretend you're in your destination time zone while still at home.

To do this, simply wake up and go to bed according to the destination time rather than your local time. Also, be sure to shift your mealtimes accordingly. As an example, if you were planning to travel from New York to Paris, start going to bed (and shift your mealtimes up) an hour earlier each day, three days ahead of your flight, and avoid bright light for two to three hours before going to bed. Here are a couple of other helpful pointers to consider:

- In the morning, be sure to expose yourself to bright full-spectrum light. If the sun is not yet up, use a clear incandescent light bulb along with a cool-blue spectrum LED to shut down melatonin production
- If traveling at night, wear blue-blocking glasses on the plane, and continue wearing them until you go to sleep, as excess blue light will impair your melatonin production and make it difficult to fall asleep

Once you're at your destination, get up as close to sunrise as possible and go outside. This will help to reset your melatonin

production. If weather and circumstances allow, it would be best to do this outdoors with your bare feet on the ground.

### **The Argonne Anti-Jet-Lag Diet**

Another jet lag trick you rarely hear about is the Argonne anti-jet-lag diet, detailed in a 2012 Harper's Magazine article by Steve Hendricks. The diet, developed by the late Charles F. Ehret in the early 1980s when he was a senior scientist at Argonne's Division of Biological and Medical Research, claims to be able to help you quickly adjust your internal clock to a new time zone. It's also recommended to "speed the adjustment of shift workers ... to periodically rotating work hours."

According to Ehret, who studied chronobiology, your biological clock is cued not only by light exposure but also by when and how much you eat. The technique involves determining the time of breakfast at your destination on the day of your arrival, and then rotating feasting and fasting four days ahead of your scheduled travel, as follows:

- **Day One: Feast day.** "Eat heartily with high-protein breakfast and lunch, and a high-carbohydrate dinner. No coffee except between 3 and 5 p.m." Examples of high-protein breakfast/lunch include steak, eggs and hamburger. Examples of high-carb dinner include pasta (no meatballs), crepes (without meat filling), potatoes and other starchy vegetables
- **Day Two: Fast day.** Avoid all carbohydrates and keep calories to a minimum. Eat only light meals of salads, soups, fruits and vegetables. If you must drink coffee or any other caffeinated beverage, drink it between 3 and 5 p.m.
- **Day Three: Feast day.** (Same as Day One)
- **Day Four: Fast day.** "If you drink caffeinated beverages, take them in morning when traveling west, or between 6 and 11 p.m. when traveling east." Avoid all alcohol on the plane. Remain fasting until breakfast (about 7.30 a.m.) at your destination, at which time you break the fast by feasting on a high-protein breakfast

The above protocol is not intended as a healthy eating strategy other than one that seems to be helpful when seeking to remediate jet lag. But alternating between feasting and fasting overall is a healthy approach as long as your food choices are healthy. As noted by Hendricks: *"Ehret theorized that the diet worked because the days of irregular eating gradually unmoored the body's biological clock from its usual rhythms, while the big breakfast and subsequent meals re-anchored the clock in the new time zone."*

### **The Anti-Jet-Lag Fast**

Another even easier strategy was devised by a team of researchers at Harvard and Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston. The anti-jet-lag fast involves determining the time of breakfast at your destination and then fasting (abstaining from all food and drink except noncaloric beverages like water) for 12 to 16 hours beforehand. As noted by Hendricks, "Since most of us go 12 to 16 hours between dinner and breakfast anyway, the abstention is a small hardship."

### **Antioxidant Support Helps Ameliorate Jet Lag Symptoms and Shield Against Radiation**

Cowden also recommends taking a high-quality, broad-spectrum antioxidant before and after boarding the plane.

Astaxanthin may be an ideal choice as it also helps shield against cosmic radiation exposure, provided you've been taking it for at least three days ahead of time. Another antioxidant supplement that can be helpful when flying is molecular hydrogen, which is a highly effective selective antioxidant.

### **Melatonin May Help You Sleep**

Once you reach your destination, take a fast-acting sublingual melatonin along with a slow-release oral melatonin around 10 p.m. (or just before bedtime if you go to bed earlier). Keep in mind that only a very small dose is required — typically 0.25 mg or 0.5 milligrams to start with, and you can adjust it up from there. Taking higher doses, such as 3 mg, can sometimes make you more wakeful instead of sleepier, so adjust your dose carefully.

Also be sure to stay well-hydrated before and during travel, whether you're flying or driving to your destination. Your brain controls sleep and it functions best when fully hydrated. As you can see, there are several ways to minimize jet lag, so the

next time you fly, try one or more of them to find a combination that works for you.