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Travel Health: Beating Brain Fog

You don't have to lose vacation time to jet lag. Recalibrate your body clock with these simple tips

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There's no cure for jet lag—unless you give up flying between time zones or decide to travel only by rail or ship. Typically, the symptoms—mental clouding, crankiness, insomnia—are worse when you travel east, because losing time and sunlight makes it harder for your circadian rhythm to adjust. It can take a full day to recover for each time zone you cross. And for some reason, travelers aged 50-plus tend to get hit harder than young'uns.

So how can you reduce the effects? According to Jacob Teitelbaum, MD, author of *From Fatigued to Fantastic!* and medical director of the 12-clinic Fibromyalgia & Fatigue Centers, these easy tricks can help relieve jet lag.

1. Sleep on the plane. While some people caution against it, Teitelbaum advises catching a few Z's in order to reset your internal clock. Since a plane is an "unnatural situation," you may need some pharmaceutical help. Teitelbaum is a fan of such herbal remedies as valerian and Enzymatic Therapy's Revitalizing Sleep Formula (an herbal mixture that includes valerian and passion flower; available at most health food stores). However, he doesn't shy away from prescribing the short-acting sleeping pill Ambien.* Since persons taking Ambien have been known to sleepwalk and even sleep-eat in rare instances, you should try it out at home first.

2. Stay hydrated. Though dehydration may not cause jet lag, it will worsen the symptoms. Drink more water than usual to counterbalance dry cabin air, flush toxins out of your body and increase your energy level, says Teitelbaum. As a rule of thumb, whenever you notice that your lips and mouth feel dry, it's time for more water. Avoid coffee, tea and alcoholic beverages, all of which are diuretics.

3. Eat well. Part of the fatigue and fogginess blamed on jet lag is actually due to poor nutrition during travel. Request a vegetarian or low-fat meal ahead of time and take a multivitamin high in B-complex and magnesium.

4. Try melatonin. This naturally occurring hormone (which is produced by the pineal gland at night) helps regulate your sleep/ wake cycle. Research shows that small doses of supplemental melatonin, sold over-the-counter in the United States, can help your body adjust to a new time zone. Teitelbaum recommends taking 2–5 mg about a half hour before you'd like to fall asleep. (Be sure to pack melatonin if you're leaving the U.S.; its sale is tightly regulated in other countries.)

5. Set your watch to the time at your destination. You've reset your internal clock—now reset your real one, even before you leave, and start eating and sleeping on that schedule as soon as possible. Some travelers begin the process a few days before their trip. If they'll be flying east, for example, they'll wake up an hour or two earlier so their body won't be thrown off by the new routine.

6. Take a (short) nap. You didn't sleep a wink on the red-eye from JFK to Heathrow. Aren't you entitled to a little snooze before hitting the streets of London? Naps aren't verboten, says Teitelbaum, as long as they're less than an hour. "And when you wake up, splash your face with cold water." This will shift your nervous system into the "awake" mode, which will help you later when you want to get to sleep at a reasonable hour—and wake up at one, too.

** Consult your physician before taking any medication—even over-the-counter treatments—and use all medications as directed.*

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