

JET LAG

Jet lag, also called flight fatigue, is a temporary disorder that causes fatigue, insomnia, and other symptoms as a result of air travel across time zones. It is considered a circadian rhythm sleep disorder, which is a disruption of the internal body clock.

Besides fatigue and insomnia, other symptoms include: anxiety, constipation, diarrhea, confusion, dehydration, headache, irritability, nausea, sweating, coordination problems, dizziness, and even memory loss.

The cause of jet lag is the inability of the body of a traveler to immediately adjust to the time in a different zone. Thus, when a person travels from Toronto and arrives in Germany at midnight Frankfurt time, his or her body continues to operate on Toronto time.

Some simple behavioural adjustments before, during and after arrival at your destination can help minimize some of the side effects of jet lag.

- Select a flight that allows early evening arrival and stay up until 10 p.m. local time. (If you must sleep during the day, take a short nap in the early afternoon, but no longer than two hours. Set an alarm to be sure not to over sleep.)
- Anticipate the time change for trips by getting up and going to bed earlier several days prior to an eastward trip and later for a westward trip.
- Upon boarding the plane, change your watch to the destination time zone.
- Avoid alcohol or caffeine at least three to four hours before bedtime. Both act as "stimulants" and prevent sleep.
- Upon arrival at a destination, avoid heavy meals (a snack—not chocolate—is okay).
- Avoid any heavy exercise close to bedtime. (Light exercise earlier in the day is fine.)
- Bring earplugs and blindfolds to help dampen noise and block out unwanted light while sleeping.
- Try to get outside in the sunlight whenever possible. Daylight is a powerful stimulant for regulating the biological clock. (Staying indoors worsens jet lag.)
- The type of foods we eat have no effect on minimizing jet lag.

Recovering from jet lag depends on the number of time zones crossed while traveling. In general, the body will adjust to the new time zone at the rate of one or two time zones per day. For example, if you crossed six time zones, the body will typically adjust to this time change in three to five days.