



ATHLETE EDUCATION • TRAVEL

JET LAG

How to manage jet lag and travel fatigue

~1 day
per time zone

is roughly how long your body clock takes to catch up. Flying east is harder than flying west.¹

1 Two different problems

Long trips cause two things. They need different fixes.²

Tired

Travel fatigue

Caused by the journey itself: early starts, cramped seats, dry air and broken sleep.

Happens on any long trip and usually clears after a good night in bed.

Clock

Jet lag

Your body clock is still on home time. Happens when you cross 3 or more time zones and lasts for days: poor sleep, daytime sleepiness, low mood, upset stomach and worse performance.

East

East hurts more

Team-sport athletes had worse jet lag, sleep and performance after flying east than after flying west.³

Baseball teams that had just flown east lost more often.⁴

2 Before you fly

Start adjusting at home so you land part-way there.

1 hr

Shift your sleep

For the 3 days before you go, move bedtime and wake time by about 1 hour a day towards the destination.⁵

Flying west

e.g. UK → USA

- Go to bed later
- Get up later
- Get light in the evening

Flying east

e.g. USA → UK, UK → Asia

- Go to bed earlier
- Get up earlier
- Get bright light in the morning⁵

Also: arrive well rested, drink well in the days before, and pack an eye mask, earplugs or headphones, a water bottle and snacks.

3 On the flight

Live on destination time from the moment you board.

Clock

Switch your watch

Set it to destination time. If it is night there, sleep with an eye mask and headphones. If it is day there, stay awake.²

<20%

Keep drinking

Cabin air is very dry, with humidity often below 20%.⁶ Sip water regularly and keep your urine pale. Go easy on caffeine and sugary drinks.

Move

Get up and move

Walk the aisle and stretch every 1 to 2 hours. Do calf raises and ankle circles in your seat.

Socks

Compression socks

Wearing flight socks cuts the risk of blood clots and reduces leg swelling on long flights.⁷

4 After you land

Light is the strongest signal for resetting your body clock. Its timing matters.⁸

Flew west

e.g. UK → USA

- Get outside in afternoon and evening light
- Stay up until local bedtime
- Keep early-morning light low for the first days

Flew east

e.g. USA → UK

- Get outside in morning light
- Dim the lights in the evening
- Crossed 8+ zones? Avoid early-morning light for 2 days; ask staff for a plan¹

30 min

Nap smart

If you need a nap, keep it under 30 minutes and before mid-afternoon local time so you still sleep at night.²

Eat

Eat on local time

Have meals at local meal times, even if you are not very hungry.

Move

Train light, outdoors

An easy session or walk outside on day 1 combines activity and daylight. Save hard sessions until you have adapted.²

6 hrs

Time your caffeine

Caffeine can help in the local morning, but none in the 6 hours before bed.⁹

Melatonin

It can reduce jet lag,¹⁰ but in the UK it is prescription-only. Only take it if the medical team advises it.

5 10 travel tips

Everyone responds differently, so listen to your body and adjust.²

Shift sleep 1 hr a day for 3 days before

Set your watch to destination time on board

Sleep on the plane only if it is night there

Water bottle always with you

Wear compression socks on long flights

Move every 1–2 hours on the flight

Get daylight at the right time on arrival

Naps under 30 mins, before mid-afternoon

Eat at local meal times

Easy training on day 1, hard sessions later

References

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Questions? Ask away.