Correct guide to getting over jet lag

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JET lag is decidedly the worst. It cuts into holiday time. Thwarts motivation. Lowers productivity. That's because being at odds with our normal sleep patterns "puts individuals at risk for a host of adverse outcomes," says Harvard Medical School sleep researcher Rebecca Robbins. There are the basic adverse outcomes, including sleeping fitfully and digesting wonkily, Robbins says, but "we also see more risky decision-making when sleep falls off the rails".



Technically speaking, jet lag should hit when you have travelled across at least two time zones, says David Neubauer, a clinical faculty member at the Johns Hopkins Sleep Disorders Center. So whether you're heading from Toledo to Taipei or from LAX to JFK, the threat of jet lag is there.
To get yourself functioning again on your next trip, here's some expert advice for travelling against your internal clock.
Prepare for jet-lag misery in
advance
Your effort to soften the jet-lag blow can start before you get on a plane (or ship, or whatever). You can try adjusting your schedule by “moving your target fall-asleep and wake-up times in
the direction of your new time zone by about 15-minute increments each day,” Robbins says.
For help with that endeavour, Neubauer recommends downloading Timeshifter, an app designed for shift workers and travellers dealing with jet lag. “It compares what your circadian system is going to be doing and whether you want to shift your clock earlier or later,” he says.
Neubauer says the app also can give you precise advice on when you should have light exposure, when you should take melatonin and when you should avoid caffeine, all depending on the destination. Follow as much as Timeshifter's advice you can and "it will probably help decrease jet lag to some extent, not necessarily eliminate it," Neubauer says.
Last, "don't start your trip already sleep-deprived," Neubauer says, acknowledging that many of us stay up too late packing or are preparing for heinously early flights. "You're just more likely to have significant symptoms," he says.
Take your flight there seriously
As you're booking flights, keep your future sleepy self in mind. For example, if you have the time and money, “avoid the red-eye wherever possible”, Robbins says, arguing that even if you can sleep it won't be good quality or sufficient rest. Instead, you're signing up for fragmented sleep interrupted by meal services, kids kicking the back of your seat, cabin lighting, take-off and landing.
If you are going to sleep on the plane, be strategic about it by doing so in accordance with your new time zone. Fight the temptation to work (or watch “The Shawshank Redemption") if everyone in your destination is asleep.
You can also sleep strategically with your seating assignment. Chloé Abidos, a flight attendant for the low-cost carrier French Bee, recommends choosing a window seat (for nicer lean and fewer disruptions) as far as you can from the galleys. Do you know what else is by the galleys? The bathrooms.
"You probably don't want the flushing sound interrupting your sleep every five minutes!" Abidos said. To improve your plane sleep even further, Abidos endorses comfortable clothes and packing gear such as a neck pillow, hoodie, a favourite blanket, eye mask, earplugs and essential oils.
Don't schedule anything important on your first day
Avoid putting anything big on your calendar on the first day of your trip unless you're willing to go into it with your worst foot forward. The splendour of the Sistine Chapel will be lost on the zombie version of you.
On a business trip to Rome, Neubauer padded his itinerary with extra time before a big meeting. "By the day after that, I was all right," he says. Follow his lead and give yourself asleep or two to adjust before your keynote speech, tuba recital or destination wedding ceremony.
Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate
Abidos's most important advice for fighting jet lag is also one of the easiest: Stay hydrated. That means chug water, and skip stuff that's not water.
As alluring as an airport beer or nightcap may be, your best bet for beating jet lag is to avoid alcohol early in your trip. "Alcohol sounds like a good idea, but it can backfire," Neubauer says. "It usually doesn't result in higher-quality sleep."
Seek out the right kind of light
at the right time
You already know that being glued to your phone screen before bed is a sleep in, but you may not be as familiar with how the sun plays a role. (Spoiler alert: It's important.)
"The sun is the strongest input to the circadian system,” Robbins says. “The morning light is the most important for starting that rhythm.”
Robbins's tip for those travelling into earlier time zones (say, Los Angeles to New York), “if you get there first thing in the morning, you don't want to go outside (right away),” she says. “What that is doing is actually just extending your circadian system even further.” Instead, she

encourages a morning nap and catching evening afternoon exposure later to help you sync to the new timezone. Make your sleep space extra sleepy

Not every accommodation is set up for sound sleeping (think blinking electronics and loud air conditioners). If you're staying at a hotel, call and ask how your stay could be made more comfortable.

“Never be afraid or shy to ask,” says Peter Roth, the Park Hyatt New York's area vice president and general manager, adding that it's helpful when guests speak up about their needs. A hotel or motel could (key word: could) have a quieter room or different

pillows. Roth says the hotel keeps things on hand such as essential oils, sleep masks and white-noise machines for better sleep. But ultimately, he recommends “be kind to yourself and to your body”, he says. “There's nothing wrong in allowing your body to have some degree of jet lag.”

When all else fails, give in

When you are deep in the throes of jet lag — feeling trapped on a physical and emotional roller-coaster — just give in.

When you're deep in it, unable to peel yourself out of bed for that morning museum ticket or staring at the ceiling wide-awake knowing your sleep time is bleeding out, don't despair. It's like the same advice they give for people who fall in quicksand, or grain silos: Don't panic. You're not going to fall asleep or wake up any easier by wallowing. Instead of flailing, stay calm and accept the fact that you will be tired. You will get over it. —IOL