

# Dodge the jet lag, enjoy your trip

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(HealthDay)—People crossing time zones may assume jet lag is something they have to endure—like airport delays and lost luggage. But there are several ways travelers can prepare for and minimize jet lag's

troubling effects, a sleep specialist says.

First, flying from west to east, such as from the United States to Europe, will result in worse jet lag than the reverse trip, explained David Earnest, who studies [circadian rhythms](#) at Texas A&M Health Science Center College of Medicine.

"You will always be hit harder by jet lag when making a four- to six-hour [time](#) jump eastbound," Earnest said in a university news release.

"This is because our body clocks are trying to advance to an earlier time, which is not as easy as adjusting to a later time gap," he said.

Earnest provided the following recommendations on how to ease jet lag:

- **Catch the red eye.** Sleeping through an overnight flight is one of the best ways to reduce the effects of jet lag. Earnest noted, however, those who aren't able to [sleep](#) on an overnight flight will be tired once they land in the early morning.
- **Avoid sleep aids.** These drugs can confuse the body clock and may worsen jet lag. They also remain in the bloodstream and can make travelers feel groggy or hung over.
- **Pass on the alcohol or caffeine.** It's a good idea to avoid these beverages on overnight flights. "It is acceptable to consume caffeine to help you stay awake at the new location, though," Earnest said.
- **Plan ahead.** People who adjust their current schedules ahead of time to accommodate the time zone of their destination may not feel as jet-lagged. This should be done at least four days before traveling. Sleep and meal times can be gradually moved about one hour per day.
- **Consider melatonin therapy.** Melatonin is a hormone that circulates in high levels at night. It tells the body when it's

nighttime and time for sleep. Unlike sleep aids, melatonin doesn't stay in the bloodstream long. Travelers may want to consider taking an over-the-counter melatonin supplement five days before traveling at the local time that coincides with evening at their destination. It will acclimate you to feel sleepy at the new location's time. It's best to check with your physician before taking any new supplement.

- **Try to adjust right away.** "Walk around, drink some coffee and explore the new city," said Earnest. "It's better to tough it out and wait to sleep until night." Exposure to sunlight will help the body adjust to a new time zone. It's fine to get to bed on the early side but avoid trying to "sleep off" [jet lag](#).

Delayed adjustment—not allowing your body clock to sync properly—ups your risk of illness. And that's especially true since you've already been in the closed environment of the airplane, Earnest added.

"Your immune system is probably already compromised. There are merits to doing the right thing and waiting until dark to sleep it off, even though that's not necessarily what your body is telling you to do," he noted.

**More information:** The National Sleep Foundation provides more information on [jet lag](#).

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