

Coping With Jet Lag



An Insomnia Clinic Quickguide

Introduction

It's the holiday of a lifetime. You've saved up all year and you're finally on the wind down before your big break. There's just one problem. Jet lag. Even if you've never experienced it before, there's a good chance you've heard the stories and you likely have some concerns.

But what is *Jet Lag*?

Jet Lag is the phenomenon that occurs when we travel to a different time zone; the severity is greatly increased, the more time zones we cover. It works by disrupting our body's natural internal clock. If, for example, you travel to New York which is five hours behind GMT, and you usually go to bed at 10pm, your body will be preparing itself for sleep around 5pm. This is going to make it difficult to take in much of the fabled New York City night life. Aside from this, other symptoms of our body clock being out of sync include:

- Irritability
- Headache
- Anxiety
- Constipation
- Nausea
- Indigestion

None of these are conducive to a relaxing holiday! In this quickguide, we'll cover some of the steps you can take to help your body adjust and enjoy a more restful holiday.

Plan Ahead

When traveling long distance, careful planning is key to both overcoming the effects of jet lag and overcoming any possible anxiety-induced sleeplessness before you travel. For instance, if you wait until the last day before packing your case and checking your passport is valid, you are likely to feel panicked and stressed which can lead to a poor night's sleep before you leave.

It's a good idea to have a checklist of all the items you are going to need before you go away and start ticking things off several weeks before you leave. This will help you achieve more restful sleep in the run up to your holiday and make your body less susceptible to the effects of jet lag.

Prepare for the New Timezone

In addition, you might want to consider adjusting your bedtime gradually before you leave. If you are going to a destination in a time zone behind GMT, start going to bed a little later in the evening; if you are going to a time zone ahead of GMT, try going to bed earlier each night. This will bring your body clock closer to the time zone to which you are traveling and make it easier to adjust when you arrive.

Travel Relaxed

You need your journey to be as stress-free and comfortable as possible to avoid arriving at your destination tired and anxious. As well as ensuring you get a good night's sleep before departure, when traveling you should:

- Wear comfortable clothing that you can easily move around in
- Pack a sleep mask and some earplugs if you are intending to sleep during the journey as this can aid deeper sleep
- Take some eye drops, moisturiser and spare clothes so that you can refresh yourself when you wake up.
- Drink plenty of water and avoid alcohol during the flight.

When you arrive, you need to try and synchronise your body clock to local time as much as possible. The quickest way to do this is to use the natural daylight. Your body clock naturally responds to daylight, so if you arrive in the daytime try and get as much natural light as possible and try to sleep only when it gets dark.

At Your Destination

If you do feel tired, there are some things you can do to provide relief:

- **Exercise** – this releases endorphins which naturally helps the body to stay awake
- **Take a nap** – if you really cannot keep your eyes open, a short nap will provide short-term relief. Try to keep it to 20-30 minutes to avoid dropping into deep sleep and further upsetting your rhythm
- **Avoid thinking about sleep** – if you are aware that you would usually be asleep by this time, try not to think about it too much as you want avoid overthinking sleep and getting wound up before you go to bed. Try writing down your worries or practicing mindfulness techniques to re-focus your thoughts away from sleep.
- **Keep the same routine**- When you do go to bed, try and follow the same bed time routine as you would at home. This will help your brain to associate that time of day with sleep and help you to get into a new rhythm more quickly.
- To avoid oversleeping in the morning, set an alarm or schedule a wakeup call. Even if it feels like you want to sleep for 16 hours, establishing a routine early on will help your body adjust more quickly and help you enjoy more of your holiday.

For further support and advice, particularly on gaining restful sleep before, during and after your holiday, contact The Insomnia Clinic on 0844 502 0485.

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