

Travel health made simple

4 – Long distance flights and Jet Lag



What is jet lag?

A biological clock exists in our body which determines when we sleep, eat, work, etc.

Rapid travel across numerous time zones disrupts this biological clock and produces unpleasant symptoms known as jet lag.

1990: Jet setter



2018: Jet lagger



Number of time zones crossed

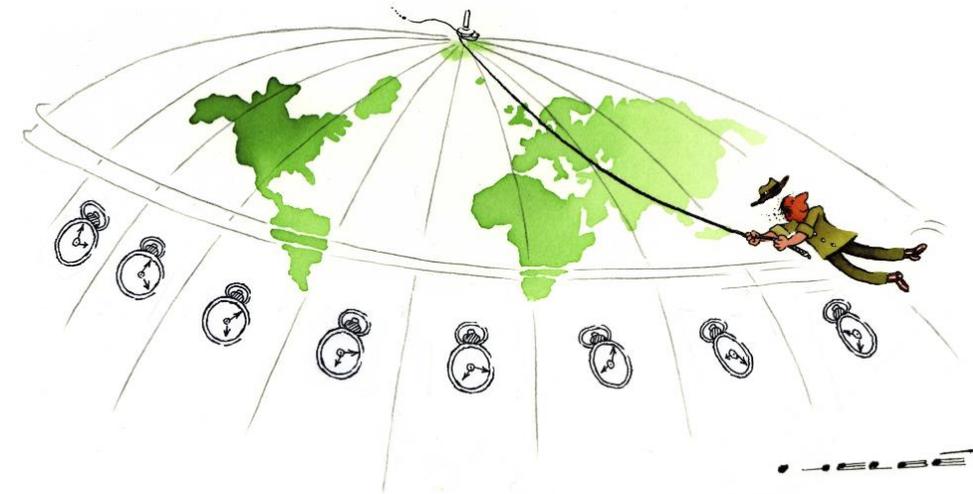
Jet lag is not linked to the duration of the flight but to the number of time zones crossed.

- A north to south 10-hour flight from Paris to South Africa produces little jet lag since it crosses few time zones.
- A 5-hour west to east flight from Los Angeles to New York produces significant jet lag since it crosses numerous time zones.

Numerous body functions are modified during long flights including sleep cycles, body temperature and hormonal secretions.



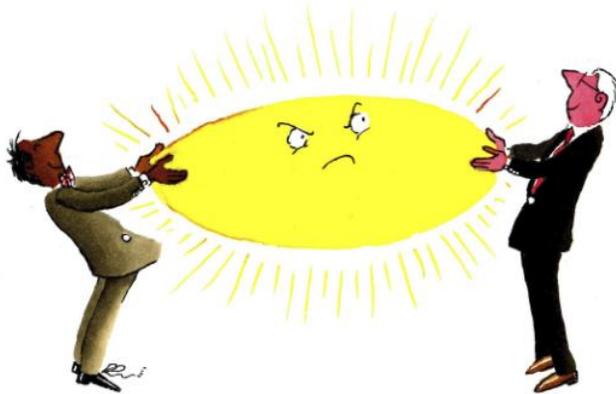
Indiana Jone's whip against jet lag



East to west? West to east?

Most travelers report worse jet lag when flying from west to east than from east to west.

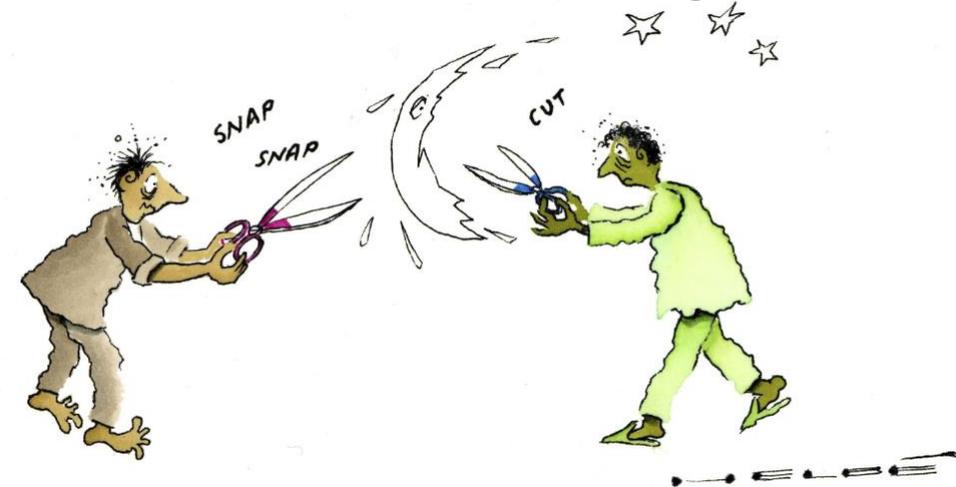
This is because the body finds it easier to extend the natural day than to shorten the natural night.



Easier to extend the natural day



Than to shorten the natural night



Symptoms of jet lag

- Irritability
- Physical, mental and intellectual fatigue
- Impaired alertness
- Lower performance
- Disorientation
- Disturbed nighttime sleep
- Inability to get to sleep at night after an eastward flight
- Early awakening after a westward flight
- Gastrointestinal problems and loss of appetite



I know how to repair your biological clock!



Reducing jet lag

If possible take daytime flights to reduce loss of sleep and resulting fatigue.

Before the trip get a good amount of sleep during the week before the trip.

During the trip set your watch to your destination's time as soon as you get on the plane and during the flight follow the new time schedule even if it means skipping a meal and sleeping instead or vice versa.



During night flights

- Use ear plugs to reduce in-flight noise
- Wear comfortable and loose fitting clothing and shoes
- Use a neck rest and/or inflatable pillow
- Use a blanket and wear an extra pair of socks to avoid the cold temperatures observed in cabin
- Avoid overeating during the flight which produces gases and cramps.
- Avoid caffeine and alcoholic beverages
- Drink plenty of water to prevent in-flight dehydration
- Eventually take a medically prescribed light sedative.



We've arrived and you're still drowsy!



Upon arrival

Bright light is a major factor in combating jet lag.

If the sun is shining at the arrival destination:

- Go outdoors for a walk or jog
- Stay awake until your normal bedtime at the destination.

If it is dark at the arrival destination:

- Go to sleep:
- Avoid bright light
- Darken the bed room
- Turn off or hide all LEDs (light emitting devices) e.g. television, computer, etc.
- Wear a blind fold or eye mask to reduce residual light
- Wear ear plugs to reduce surrounding noise



On the first day after arrival

Avoid:

- critical meetings
- driving long distances - Alertness is low and risk of vehicle accidents is high due to drowsiness.



No jetlag with this mattress!



Conclusion

Better management of jet lag after a long distance flight can make travel less tiring and allow you to be in shape upon arrival at your destination.

Melatonin - a hormone naturally produced by the brain - is reputed, but not confirmed to be effective in reducing jet lag.

