

Jet Lag

Going on holiday is exciting, but it also takes it's toll.

For most people the travelling side of the holiday is a drag, getting to the airport with all your baggage, finding a car parking space, being on time, checking in, sitting bored for hours and then the flight.

Jet lag should not be confused with the tiredness that one feels after a long journey in a car or after flying north or south for a considerable number of hours. One's body functions are controlled by a "physiological clock" which gets disrupted when we fly from east to west or vice versa to destinations in different time zones. Jet lag seems to be more severe when travelling from west to east than east to west. The symptoms experienced when the "physiological clock" is confused are referred to as "jet lag".

The symptoms are:

- Feeling of tiredness during the first few days upon arrival at one's destination;
- Change in normal bowel activity e.g. constipation or diarrhea;
- Inability to fall asleep at night;
- For athletes, inability to perform or train optimally.

The duration of jet lag depends on the individual, but would also depend on the number of time zones crossed. On average the symptoms will last one day for every time zone. Fitter people tend to cope better and the elderly may suffer from it the worst.

There are precautions which can be taken:

Before the flight:

- The better you are organized, the less rushed and stressed you will feel.
- If it is practical, adjust your sleeping patterns to the new time zone in the week prior to the flight i.e. change the time you go to bed, and get up.
- If you are able to, allow yourself sufficient time to overcome jet lag, by adding a few extra days to the trip. This is particularly important for older people.

During the flight:

- Do try to sleep during the flight.
- Minimise alcohol intake and avoid coffee and tea.
- Drink plenty of fluids during the flight.
- Try to do some static exercises or walk inside the plane as much as possible.
- Avoid over indulging, try to keep to your normal eating pattern

Upon Arrival:

- Try to adjust to your holiday destination's time as soon as possible.
- Exposure to sunlight (just by being outdoors) will 'advance' your body clock, so instead of getting into bed immediately, try first to spend some time outdoors.
- If possible, do not sleep during the day, rather go to bed extra early on the first night.
- Increase fluid intake.
- For sportspeople it is vital not to train shortly after arrival; keep training to the bare minimum in the first couple of days.