15 Useful Remedies to Overcome Jet Lag and Excessive Sleepiness
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With ever increasing busy work schedules and frequent international meetings, most people of the fast-paced modern world are accustomed to long distance flying. But one of the biggest disadvantages of these long-haul flights is the irritating and annoying jet lag or flight fatigue that makes you feel over-exhausted and drained while your body struggles to catch up with the changes of the new time zone. The medical term for jet lag is desynchronosis or time zone change syndrome. It is a temporary disorder that gets better with proper rest and a balanced diet chart rich in nutritious foods. Jet lag is basically a type of sleep disorder and physiological condition that occurs due to disruption of the natural sleep-wake cycle of the body, also known as the circadian rhythm.

What is the Circadian Rhythm?

It is necessary to have some idea of the circadian rhythm of the body and its functioning in order to understand jet lag and its causes in a better way. The circadian rhythm is the 24-hour biological clock that determines the biochemical, physiological and behavioural process of the body. The word circadian is derived from the Latin word “Circa” meaning “about” and “diem” meaning “day”. This circadian rhythm is influenced by external factors such as the light-dark cycle of night and day and temperatures which in turn regulate the daily activities such as sleep, waking, eating and regulation of body temperatures.
People with jet lag have disturbed sleep-wake patterns and the more timezones a person has crossed rapidly, the more severe are the jet lag symptoms. The recovery from a jet lag depends on the age of the person. The older a person is, the more serious are the jet lag symptoms and they will take longer to synchronize their body clock. Jetlag is less common among children and babies.

8 Common Causes of Jet Lag

Almost all long-distance flyers who have travelled across a few time zones must have experienced some of the symptoms of jet lag and disturbed sleep. But it is necessary to know what causes jet leg in order to make optimum use of the solutions and remedies.

Disruption of the Circadian Rhythm – Our body’s natural 24-hour routine which is controlled by the biological clock is called the Circadian Rhythm, and a jet lag occurs when this rhythm is disrupted. Your body is used to a regular schedule of light and darkness at certain times of the day, but when you travel to a new time zone, this routine gets disrupted and because air travel is so quick, the body has to catch up with this change rapidly and re-establish its circadian rhythm all over again. It takes time for the body to adjust to the new times of light and darkness, eating and temperature differences.
Influence of Sunlight – One of the key influences on the body’s internal clock is sunlight because it regulates the release of melatonin hormone, which helps synchronize sleep/wake cycles and timings. At night, the hypothalamus signals the brain to release melatonin and during daylight it signals the brain to produce very little melatonin. The new time zone with its new daylight and night timings disrupts this adjustment.

Pre-Flight Condition – It is always suggested to start your travel well rested because your pre-flight condition has an important effect on jet lag. If you are exhausted, excited, stressed, hung over or nervous before the flight then you are paving the path for a pretty good spell of jet lag. So, make it a point to have a good night’s sleep the night before departure.

Air Pressure In the Cabin – At an altitude of almost 30,000 feet, the aircraft experiences a pressure of 8,000’ which causes swelling, tiredness and lethargy. Research shows that the changes in cabin pressure along with high altitude contribute to certain symptoms of jet lag, regardless of travelling across time zones.

Dry Atmosphere – The dry atmosphere inside the aircraft causes headaches, excessively dry skin, dry nasal membranes and dry throat which can lead to sore throats, coughs and flu. Therefore, it is suggested to drink plenty of water throughout the flight.

East and West Difference – Symptoms of jet lag are usually worse when travelling east rather than west. This happens because the body finds it less challenging adapt to a longer day in the west where you gain time but in the case of a shorter day in the east you lose time.

Alcohol – The effects of alcohol are never pleasing on the ground, and these effects multiply several times when you are flying. It disrupts the body’s natural clock, affects the normal functioning of the brain and lastly gives a bad hangover which makes the jet lag symptoms worse.

Inactivity – Sitting in a cramped position for long hours without any exercises is the worst aspect of long distance flights and makes the jet lag worse afterwards. Try to do sitting yoga stretches for lower back, legs and neck and if possible walk a few times up and down the aisle to stretch the stressed muscles and get the blood moving throughout the body.
Symptoms of Jet Lag

The symptoms of jet lag differ from person to person and usually worsen the farther you travel. The symptoms occur if you have travelled across two or more time zones.

- Insomnia or disturbed sleep with early waking or excessive sleepiness
- Daytime fatigue and lethargy
- Headache
- Digestive disorders – constipation or diarrhea
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty in concentration on work or functioning properly
- Mood changes and feeling of being unwell
- Feelings of irritability, anxiety, confusion
- Dehydration
- Dizziness, light-headedness and nausea
- Memory problems
- Muscle soreness
- Heartbeat irregularities

15 Effective Ways and Remedies to Beat the Jet Lag

Although there are no miracle cures of jet lag, there are a few tips and quick remedies that can help you to stay alert throughout the day and enjoy sound sleep at night even when you are a couple of time zones away from your home.

Acclimate Your Body in Advance

One of the best jet lag remedies that most long distance flyers follow is getting their body tuned and adjusted to the new time zone a few days before they actually make the trip. For example, people heading to the east can eat an hour earlier and go to sleep an hour earlier for three days before they actually leave and reverse the process before the make the journey back home.
People travelling to the west can push back their bedtime one hour later than normal and wake up one hour later than normal and increase the time progressively each day.

Start Your Trip Well Rested

Another smart way to make up for your jet lag sleep is to leave home well rested. Undergoing a journey halfway around the world is stressful in itself, why make things worse by starting your journey frazzled and worn out?
Keep the last 48 hours for yourself so that you have two whole days to pack up and take rest and make yourself physically and mentally ready for the long flight so that you can enjoy and have fun all through the trip rather than coping with your confused senses for the first part of the trip.

Fly a Day or Two Early

Yet another easy and simple way to avoid excessive daytime sleepiness and other symptoms of jet lag is by flying into the destination a day earlier so that the body gets plenty of time to adjust the body’s clock.

Business travellers should try to schedule their meetings on a Monday so that they can reach the destination by Saturday and get used to the time difference and allow their body’s circadian rhythm to get used to the new time zone along with new sleeping hours.

Avoid Napping Right After You Arrive

Even if you are exhausted and drained after a long flight, try to resist the temptation to hit the sack right away. This is one of the time-tested jet lag cures that helps the body to adjust more quickly to the changes.
Go out and enjoy the sun, walk around the hotel poolside or take a stroll at the beach or local market so that you can stay active until the right time to sleep. This will help you to doze off into deep restorative sleep once you lie down on the bed and reset your body’s natural 24-hour clock.

Drink Plenty of Water

This is by far the ultimate jet lag treatment that most long distance flyers swear by. Drinking plenty of water before, during and after the flight helps to prevent dehydration and allows you to have a restful sleep and recover from jetlag quickly without any medication.
Ask the flight attendant to provide a whole bottle of water or bring your own bottle and fill it up from a drinking fountain after passing security. You can never have too much of water on a plane. Don’t be scared about running to the toilet all the time, this is even better because moving around will improve blood circulation throughout the body and help to prevent jet lag.

Avoid Airline Food

Other than sleep the other factor that the body uses to set its internal clock is the food you eat. Therefore, it is necessary to watch what you eat and when you eat. Some people even go to the extent of following a jet lag diet which starts four days before the departure. You can keep things under control by simply eating light on the day of the departure and then avoid airplane food as much as possible.
Carry your own food instead and eat as little and as lightly as possible for the entire duration of the flight. The best option is to stick to fruit salads, vegetable salads and fruit juices.

Have Sleeping Medication with Care

You might think that sleeping pills and sleep medications are the best solutions to the problem of how to get more deep sleep during a long flight, but your strategy can actually backfire. Sleeping pills can help you to sleep through the overnight flight but if the effects of the pill last longer than the flight then you will arrive at your destination drowsy and sleepy.

Common sleep medications do not induce natural sleep and actually alleviate jet lag symptoms such as headaches, grogginess and the inability to sleep at night.
Avoid Coffee, Tea and Soda

Although you might be in love with your favorite cup of Joe, in reality there are numerous disadvantages of coffee. Caffeinated beverages like coffee, tea and soda with caffeine interferes with the sleep/wake patterns and the natural body clock and can lead to sleep deprivation throughout the flight and cause excessive sleeping after you reach the destination.

In addition, caffeine also causes dehydration which makes things worse on long distance flights.

Say No to Alcohol

It is best to stay away from alcohol throughout the flight and refrain from it the day before you resume your journey. High altitude multiplies the effects of alcohol on the body.
It dehydrates you by increasing urine output which results in disturbed sleep. Although it can apparently accelerate the onset of sleep, it actually disrupts the quality of sleep and disturbs your sleep pattern to worsen the jet lag symptoms.

Eat Carb Rich Food

Having carb-rich foods the night before your flight or during the flight is another effective solution to the problem of how to get deep sleep during flight and avoid jet lag.

Research shows that having carbohydrate-rich foods increase the potential for normal sleep by providing the brain with a source of tryptophan which is used to produce the sleep-inducing
neurotransmitter serotonin. It also helps to keep you relaxed and composed and reduces anxiety and anxiousness.

Keep it Cool and Dark

Another factor that affects the body’s natural clock is temperature. If you are flying during what would be night hours at your destination, try to get some sleep on the plane. You can cut out the noise by using ear plugs and use eyeshade to cut out the light and turn air-conditioner valve on high. As the core temperature of the body falls, it signals the body that it’s time for sleep.

Higher temperature raises the body’s core temperature and signals the brain that it’s time to wake up. This holds true for your hotel room as well. Pull those heavy curtains to darken your room and lower the room temperature which gives a clear signal to your body to sleep.

Use Melatonin Supplements

Melatonin is a natural hormone released by the brain, and it helps control the circadian rhythm of the body which determines when we fall asleep and wake up. Melatonin depends on the amount of light there is. Excessive light suppresses melatonin release.
Melatonin supplements are an effective jet lag medications that can help the body to adjust quickly to the new surroundings. Melatonin supplements are usually available in 30 mg pills but the lowest dose possible should be used, and it should be taken for a short period only. Higher doses of melatonin may have side effects such as nightmares and vivid dreams.

Homeopathy

One of the safe and dependable solutions to the problem of how to avoid jet lag is homeopathic remedies. The tinny pellets used in homeopathy treatment contain minute dosage of naturally occurring substances like arnica montana, daisy, wild chamomile, ipecac, club moss, etc. all of which are known to induce sleep and overcome jetlag.
But these substances are diluted to such an extent that they are no longer detectable in the remedies and are considered to have no toxic effect but non-homeopathic doses of these substances can be toxic.

Valerian

If you are considering natural remedies for jet lag then you can use the herb valerian which works as a natural sleep aid. It works as effectively as jet lag pills and helps the body to adjust to new time zones by allowing people to fall asleep at their desired time.
Unlike other sleeping pills, valerian is not addictive and has no side effects like grogginess. It is suggested to take 300 to 600 mg valerian root extract capsules about an hour before bedtime to promote restful sleep.

Hops

Hops are another effective herbal remedy for curing jet lag symptoms, and this herb is known for its pleasantly bitter taste. Like valerian, hops are beneficial as a sleep inducer because of its mild sedative properties. In addition, hops also act as digestive and helps in controlling some secondary symptoms of jet lag like constipation.
Hops can be brewed into a soothing tea or used as an aromatherapy product. Pregnant women and those suffering from depression should avoid drinking hops tea.

Now, make your travelling easier and simpler and enjoy every trip right from the beginning till the end by overcoming jet lag and getting restful sleep.

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