

# SLEEP AND TRAVEL



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Sleep disturbance following and during a trip overseas is commonly known as 'jet lag'.

Jet lag occurs when your body thinks it's one time, but because you have travelled across many time zones it is actually another. This puts your 'body clock' or circadian rhythms out of synch and can cause sleepiness in the day, disturbed sleep at night, headaches and constipation.

Jet lag is most common if you fly more than five hours in a different time from your home country. When flying east the effects are more significant, as this involves you going to bed earlier than your body expects, this is far harder than pushing yourself to get to bed later.

Travel also affects our eating routine. There is a link between what we eat and synchronising our body clocks – raising insulin levels help to slow down the body clock pushing it forward and helping the traveller go to sleep earlier. So when you reach your destination if you want to go to sleep, eat carbohydrate rich foods which trigger the release of insulin but if you want to stay awake longer eat proteins or fats which lower insulin release.

Other tips are:

1. Change your sleep pattern before a trip – if you are going east, go to bed and get up progressively earlier for two or three nights prior to the trip. If going west, do the opposite.
2. Set your watch to local time as soon as you get on the plane and sleep / stay awake accordingly. This will help you upon your arrival.
3. The body clock is activated by light and food. Fasting can help re-set the body clock which might be helpful. Or follow the above advice if you land and need to stay awake – eat proteins and if you arrive after lunch eat a carb rich meal at 4pm and then stay off food until breakfast the next morning.
4. Take advantage of light. If travelling west, make sure you maximise your light exposure in the afternoon and east maximise your light in the morning. There is an app called Entrain which is free to download which can help reset light exposure for travellers.
5. Anchoring your sleep. Ensure you get at least four hours sleep on your first night. So do not try and stay up all night to ensure a good night's sleep the next.

There are various new technologies that are helping those that experience jet lag such as re-timer glasses ([www.re-timer.com](http://www.re-timer.com)) that emit green spectrum light that helps adjust melatonin production (the hormone necessary for us to sleep) and also modern planes which are less pressurised help increase the O<sub>2</sub> level in the blood which has also been found to be helpful.