

Sleep Tips for Traveling

Travel for business or pleasure can demand high performance amid stress, hectic schedules, heavy meals, and late nights – all a recipe for poor sleep. Losing as little as one and a half hours of sleep for just one night reduces daytime alertness by about one-third. Excessive daytime sleepiness also impairs memory and the ability to think and process information efficiently.

Here are some tips to promote a good night's sleep no matter where you are!



Traveling Over Time Zones

Our circadian rhythm essentially influences when we sleep and the quantity and the quality of our sleep. Flying across time zones changes the principal time cue (light) for setting and resetting our 24-hour circadian rhythm. It may also be altered factors such as naps, bedtime and exercise.

In general, “losing” time (traveling east) is harder to adjust to than “gaining” time (traveling west). When traveling east, an earlier bedtime may make it hard to fall asleep and cause wakefulness during the night. When traveling west, you may fall asleep easily but may have a hard time waking up. Generally, it takes about one day to adjust for each hour of time change.

To support your circadian rhythm, expose yourself to light during your waking hours as much as possible – but don't expose yourself to bright light when it is dark outside. Even the light from a computer screen can affect your sleep.

Pre-Flight and In-Flight Tips

- **Plan ahead.** This includes packing your luggage in advance, finishing presentations or chores, confirming flight and hotel reservations, and getting to the airport on time. A little planning goes a long way. Leaving things to the last minute increases stress and may cause a late bedtime. You

may also want to time your flight to arrive in the morning when losing several hours of sleep to get that light cue to help reset your internal clock. Always make sure you are well rested before your trip!

- **Be sleep-ready.** Get a sleep kit ready to go! Ear plugs, eye covers and soothing music will come in handy on the plane or in your hotel. A C-shaped pillow may be helpful in preventing a stiff neck.
- **Stress less and prepare for delays.** Delays are beyond your control. If your expectations are in line with reality, you will be much less frustrated and upset. It is a good time to read that book that has been on your nightstand for the last few months.
- **Get comfortable.** Get a pillow or two and blanket. Take off your shoes or loosen the laces to improve circulation. Wear something comfortable and layered, because you never know if it will be too hot or cold on the plane.
- **Drink water and avoid alcohol and caffeine.** Caffeine and alcohol are diuretics, causing you to go to the bathroom frequently. This, along with the dry cabin air, can increase your chances of dehydration. One alcoholic drink in the air can be act like two on the ground.

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- **Nap carefully.** Consider a short nap on a short flight and a longer one on a longer flight. On longer flights consider waiting until the latter portion of the flight so you wake and feel refreshed just as the flight is about to end. However, napping more than 30 to 45 minutes may put you into a deep sleep, making you feel more tired when you wake up.

At Your Destination

When booking a hotel, ask for a room away from a noisy ballroom, bar or restaurant. If you are not

with family, try to stay away from others with babies or small kids. Make sure the alarm clock in the room isn't already set to go off when you don't want it to.

When booking your hotel, be sure to ask about:

- **Quiet spots.** These are rooms or whole floors that are explicitly reserved for customers who want a good night's sleep and may have certain restrictions against children, loud music, parties, etc.
- **Spa facilities.** These may include steam, sauna, aromatherapy, exercise equipment and massage to help guests relax.

Lifestyle on the Road

With room service and late-night events and dinners, making good choices to promote sound sleep may be difficult. Travelers often eat and drink more, and sleep less, than they do at home. Alcohol is often used as a sleep enhancer and caffeine to boost performance, but these have negative impacts on sleep.

Here are some useful tips:

- **Utilize your prime time.** If you're on a 2- to 3-day trip that crosses multiple time zones, try to plan meetings on your home time, during the midday hours, because your body may not have enough time to adjust.
- **Let the sunshine in.** During the day and meetings, let as much light into the room as possible and stay active, whether talking or just taking notes.
- **If you snooze you don't lose.** If you are really wiped out, try to take a short 10- to 20-minute nap.
- **Cut caffeine.** Caffeine can stay in your body longer than you may think – up to 14 hours. Cutting out caffeine at least 4 to 6 hours before bedtime can help you fall asleep easier.
- **Drink alcohol in moderation.** Alcohol may initially help you fall asleep, but as your body clears it from your system, it can also cause symptoms that disturb sleep like nightmares, sweats and headache. Drink one glass of water for every alcoholic beverage consumed to try to reduce these symptoms.
- **Relax before bedtime.** Develop some kind of pre-sleep ritual (reading, light stretching, a hot bath) to break the connection between the day's stress and bedtime. These rituals can be as short as 10 minutes.
- **Exercise at the right time for you.** Regular exercise can help you get a good night's sleep. The timing and intensity of exercise seems to play a key role in its effects on sleep. If you are the type of person who gets energized or becomes more alert after exercise, it may be best not to exercise in the evening.
- **Eat right, sleep tight.** Try not to go to bed hungry, but avoid heavy meals before bedtime. An overfull belly can keep you up. Also, try not to drink anything after 8 pm. This can keep you from getting up to use the bathroom during the night.



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