
How to Minimize Jet Lag

A practical guide for the well-traveled woman

You can be the most experienced traveler in the world and jet lag will still find you. Cross enough time zones and your body will let you know.

Why Jet Lag Happens

Jet lag occurs because your circadian rhythm — your internal clock that regulates sleep, hormones, digestion, and energy — is still aligned with your home time zone. When you travel across multiple time zones quickly, your environment changes overnight but your biology does not. That mismatch creates fatigue, poor sleep, brain fog, and sometimes mood or digestive changes.

Most people naturally run on a slightly longer-than-24-hour cycle, which is why traveling east (shortening your day) is usually harder than traveling west. How quickly you adjust also varies from person to person, influenced by genetics, age, and the direction and distance of travel.

What Actually Helps

The key is resetting your internal clock — not just managing symptoms.

1. Light is your most powerful tool

Light is the primary signal that resets your circadian rhythm — not the clock on your phone. After eastward travel, seek morning light and limit light at night. After westward travel, the opposite helps. Even a short walk outside in the morning can make a real difference. Timing matters: light at the wrong time can actually shift your clock in the wrong direction.

On the plane: If it is nighttime at your destination, create darkness even if you cannot sleep — use an eye mask and keep your eyes closed. If it is daytime at your destination, try to stay awake and get as much light as possible. It does not have to be perfect. You are just nudging your body in the right direction.

2. Melatonin, timed correctly

Low-dose melatonin (0.5 to 1mg) can support the shift, especially for eastward travel. Higher doses can cause grogginess and are not more effective. For eastward travel, take it 30 to 60 minutes before your target bedtime at your destination for the first few nights. Melatonin works by shifting your internal clock earlier.

For westward travel, most people do not need it. What matters most is when you take it, not how much. Taken at the wrong time, it can move your clock in the wrong direction.

3. Move your body

Gentle movement — walking, stretching, getting outside — helps signal daytime to your body. This is one reason the first day of our trips is always kept lighter. Movement helps, but intensity is not the goal.

4. Use caffeine thoughtfully

Caffeine does not reset your clock, but it can help you stay awake when you need to. Small amounts earlier in the day can help. Too much, or too late, will interfere with sleep and slow your adjustment.

5. Stay hydrated and limit alcohol

Staying hydrated helps you feel better overall, but it does not fix jet lag. Alcohol may feel relaxing in the moment, but it fragments sleep and tends to make the adjustment harder.

6. Build in a buffer if you can

Arriving a day early before a big trip makes a meaningful difference, especially for active itineraries. That space gives your body time to begin adjusting so you are not starting the experience already depleted.

A Tool Worth Knowing About: Timeshifter

Timeshifter is an app developed by a neuroscientist at Harvard Medical School who spent decades working with NASA and Formula 1 drivers on circadian performance. It creates a personalized jet lag plan based on your specific flights and sleep patterns, telling you exactly when to seek light, avoid light, sleep, nap, and use melatonin or caffeine.

They offer one free trip so you can try it before committing.

The Bottom Line

Jet lag is not something you completely avoid — but you can work with your body instead of against it. Light, timing, movement, and a bit of intention go a long way.

And once you arrive, something else takes over. The energy of being somewhere new, the pull of the experience, the quiet excitement of stepping into a different rhythm.