

Jet Lag

After rapid travel across several time zones jet lag occurs. This is because the biologic clock takes time to adjust to the new time zone. It often occurs in conjunction with travel fatigue. Insomnia and daytime tiredness are the usual symptoms. On its own, the biologic clock resets at one hour per day for travel east and 1 ½ hours per day for travel west. Travelers can speed this adjustment by exposing themselves to sunlight in the morning when they travel to the east and sunlight in the evening when they travel west. This program may not work for travelers crossing more than six time zones.



Melatonin taken at bedtime will also speed adjustment to the new time zone. Melatonin is available over the counter in 3 mg tablets and the usual dose for jet lag is two pills. Zolpidem can also be used to counteract the effects of jet lag and may be particularly helpful for travel across more than 5 time zones. Zolpidem is habit forming and its use should be limited to the first two or three nights after arrival. Many people experience a night of wakefulness upon stopping Zolpidem, but are able to sleep well the following night. Because Zolpidem can cause temporary amnesia, traveler who want to use it to promote sleep on a long flight, should exercise caution.