

Are You Well Traveled?

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Business travel can be exhausting. Not only are you contending with the stresses of airports, crowded flights and changing time zones, but you are expected to perform, conduct business and be effective upon arrival. It's a tall order. Here are a few tips that may make business travel less stressful if not enjoyable.

Symptoms of circadian rhythm disruption or "jet lag" are well known: exhaustion, headache, indigestion, irritability, dehydration and impaired coordination. NASA experts say that we require about a day of recovery for every time zone crossed. Flying east is supposedly harder on the body than flying west. A major US study showed that age and flying at night may exacerbate jet lag. The greatest sufferers may be people traveling from humid sea level areas [Houston, we have problem (I've always wanted to say that!)] and people who already have sleep difficulties, are used to a rigid routine or who are not fit or rested. Although cures and remedies abound, there is no undisputed evidence in support of any particular herbal or other remedy. Experts do agree that everyone can benefit from the following:

In Flight Tips to Reduce Jet Lag

- don't depart exhausted and plan to "catch up on the plane." Get a full night sleep prior to departure.
- bring water on the plane and drink it (WATER – not tea, juice, coffee, soda or alcohol).
- once onboard, set your watch to destination time.
- remove your shoes and get your feet up if you can. Stow carry on bags and brief cases in the overhead bins. Don't clutter up the area by your feet.
- Get comfortable and go to sleep immediately – as soon as the plane pulls away from the terminal. Don't wait for the inflight meals, drinks or entertainment.
- If you eat on the plane, Eat Lightly and resist the temptation to drink alcohol. Alcohol worsens dehydration at the pressurized cabin altitude of approx. 8000 ft and interferes with restful sleep.
- Get as much exercise as you can during the flight. Get up and walk the aisle every hour while you are awake. Perform stretch exercises in your seat, in the aisles and during stopovers.
- Pilots and seasoned travelers swear by stop over showers, to refresh and improve circulation. Check for shower facilities in airline lounges in major hubs and take advantage of them.
- Don't use prescription sleeping pills during the flight. They often leave you groggy and you will be miserable if you take the medication and the environment prevents you from sleeping. A better option may be one over the counter diphenhydramine (Benadryl) capsule about 30 minutes prior to an early bedtime at the hotel.
- wear loose, comfortable clothing and shoes you can easily slip on and off. Bring thick socks for on the aircraft. No ties or tight waist bands. No high heels or panty hose.

Most of you have heard about “Economy Class Syndrome” (ECS). ECS is the term associated with a serious condition called deep vein thrombosis (DVT). Prolonged sitting and limited physical activity during air travel are risk factors for DVT. The problem results when a blood clot forms in the deep vein system of the body, often times the legs. Sometimes these clots resolve on their own and are never diagnosed. The condition becomes more serious when a piece of the clots breaks off and travels to the major blood vessels in the chest. This is called a pulmonary embolism and it can lead to death. An alarming statistic, London’s Heathrow Airport reports one passenger death a month from DVT. Also you may remember the 40 yr old news reporter who developed a serious DVT and subsequently died of a pulmonary embolism after sleeping in the cramped confines of a tank while reporting in Iraq.

Although DVT can strike individuals who are in good health with no warning, there are persons who are at greater risk. Obesity, pregnancy, chronic heart disease, use of birth control pills, recent history of cancer, previous blood clots or varicose veins are a few of the more common risk factors. Recommendations to reduce the possibility of DVT are familiar to the frequent savvy traveler: Get up and move around, walk every hour. Drink one 12oz can or 500cc bottle of water every hour or two. Do stretching exercises in your seat and keep the area around your feet uncluttered to promote movement. Elevate your feet as much as possible. Of course, this is much easier to accomplish if you have the luxury of business class seating but even in coach, stacking a few pillows under your feet will help. Wear loose, comfortable clothing and take off your shoes during the flight. Most flight attendants will sternly advise you to wear thick socks to walk around the plane and absolutely in the lavatory.

What about those pricey elastic leg support socks or “gradient compression hosiery”? This doctor is a fan of these garments, especially for long haul travel. Gradient compression hosiery helps prevent leg discomfort by delivering pressure at the ankle that gradually decreases as it extends up the leg. This pressure helps the veins contract with the muscle activity and pump blood up toward the heart rather than allowing it to pool in the legs. For comfort, the garments that extend to just below the knee are the most wearable and practical. They come in dark colors for men and women and no longer look like something found only in a hospital. They also make your legs feel less tired and achy after long days of walking in foreign capitals or standing at receptions and meetings. Some sources also suggest taking an aspirin tablet prior to departing and at safe intervals during your trip. Aspirin is a proven and safe blood thinner for most people but it is best to review this plan with your personal physician before taking.