

Snooze on the go

Sleep always takes a hit when you are travelling. Here are some tips on how to get some rest on the move

■ By Rich Silver

WHETHER YOU'RE PLANNING to travel by plane, train, or road, there are three factors to consider for sleeping well in your new place and on the journey:

1 Prepare before you leave

Being well-rested before any trip is the best preparation you can make. Here are some sleep hygiene habits you should try to follow at least two days prior to your departure.

IF IT'S NOT MEALTIME AT YOUR DESTINATION, SKIP THE AIRLINE MEAL SO YOU STAY IN SYNC WITH THE TIME ZONE YOU'RE HEADING TO

Relax. Get in the habit of winding down an hour before bed. Rushing around before you hit the mattress often means a mind that rushes around while you're in bed. Take a warm bath to melt away the tension of your day. Stay away from checking e-mail or watching high-tension programmes on the TV just before going to bed.

Avoid alcohol in the evening. Alcohol is a major sleep disruptor. It can help you fall asleep, but when it wears off in three or four hours, you'll pop awake. Then getting back to sleep can be difficult.

Cut out caffeine several hours before you intend to sleep. Caffeine stays in the system for a long time, making it difficult to fall asleep. Many medications also contain caffeine. Taking these medications earlier in the day may help you sleep better at night. Check with your doctor about this if you have trouble falling asleep. Having chocolate in the evening may also keep you up.

Say no to nicotine. Smoking acts as a stimulant, so if you are a smoker, reduce the quantity few days before you are scheduled to travel.

Snack. Having a small snack an hour or two before bed is a good idea. It keeps hunger from waking you up. Tart cherries are one of the best foods for sleep because they contain melatonin. Oatmeal, cereal, bananas, walnuts, peanut butter, and tofu are also good. If dairy products and eggs are part of your diet, eat them. They contain tryptophan, which helps with falling asleep.

Avoid big meals before bed. It may be tempting to indulge in greasy, high-fat foods at dinner. However, you'll pay a heavy price with indigestion. These foods also disrupt sleep cycles. If you're excited about trying the local cuisine when you travel, consider making lunch your biggest meal of the day.

Turn off your cell phone. Or at least keep it on silent mode to make certain it doesn't ring and wake you up. Also, light from mobile devices can disrupt sleep. So if you insist on keeping the device on in your bedroom, lower the brightness setting. And keep the phone a couple of feet away from your eyes.

Will you be flying?

Jet lag is a sleep disorder that disrupts your biological clock. It can cause insomnia, stomach upset, exhaustion, bad temper and foggy thinking. How you reduce the effects of jet lag depends on how long you'll be travelling, how many time zones you'll be crossing, and which direction you're going.

If you're only going to be gone two days, don't bother trying to readjust your time schedule. Eat and sleep at the same times as you do at home. But if it's a long trip, across many time zones and for several days, adjust your bedtime before your trip. If you're flying east, go to bed one to two hours sooner than you normally would, two or three days before your trip. If you're heading west, practise going to bed one to two hours later than normal.

You can also use light to relieve jet lag and help you sleep better. If you are flying east, and crossing fewer than eight time zones, get out into bright sunlight in the morning. If going west, seek exposure to sunlight in the evening. If you're travelling east over eight time zones or more, avoid morning sunlight until a few days have passed. If you're flying west, you should avoid light in the evening hours for a few days.

You can avoid being exposed to bright light by wearing sunglasses, even indoors. And if you don't have access to sunlight,

consider carrying a small blue light box with you as you travel.

Special advice for people with sleep apnoea

If you have obstructive sleep apnoea, and use a CPAP [continuous positive airway pressure] machine to help you sleep, there are important precautions you should take before flying.

First, call the airline and find out their policies on using CPAP during the flight. Different airlines have different policies and a lot of what you need to know may not be found on airlines' websites. Some allow battery-operated machines. Few allow you to plug into the aircraft power supply. And some airlines only allow a certain type of CPAP machine.

2 Adapt as you travel

I've always liked trains. However, they're cramped, they sway and they rattle. To sleep well on a train, you have to adapt to the conditions. The best advice is to always carry ear plugs and a sleep or eye mask with you. An inflatable pillow comes in handy too.

If you suffer from motion sickness, it's tough to sleep when you're dizzy or nauseous. So talk to your doctor before you leave to see if taking a medication is a good choice for you. Some people succeed in calming their motion sickness using natural remedies such as ginger tea or ginger supplements.

When flying, it's important to adapt to the new area you will soon be in. For example, sleeping during a flight journey helps if it's night time at your destination. If it's not meal-

time at your destination, skip the airline meal so you stay in sync with the time zone you're heading to. The point is to sleep well in your new surroundings, adapt your life right now to what is happening at your destination.

3 Settle into your new place

If you're going to be staying in a hotel, here are some strategies for good sleep:

- » Keep the temperature in your hotel room at between 18 and 22 degrees Celsius. This is the ideal temperature for sleep.
- » Call your hotel ahead of time. Make sure you don't get stuck with a room near the elevators, vending and ice machines, above an exercise area, or near the front desk.
- » Studies show exercise significantly improves sleep quality. Bring your exercise clothing and shoes and get in a 30-minute workout at the hotel's gym. Or simply go for a brisk walk every day.

Keep in mind that no matter where you stay when you travel, a dark room is essential for a good night's sleep.

A note about melatonin

Melatonin is a hormone released by the pineal gland in response to darkness. In supplement form, it helps some people fall asleep quicker and sleep better. And studies have shown it to be effective for jet lag in doses of between 0.5 to 5 mg. Ask your doctor about how you can use it as a supplement.



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