

How to avoid jet lag

TODAY Travel Editor Peter Greenberg reveals his personal formula

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Many of my friends and fellow travelers are angry at me. Why? Because I don't get jet lag. And I fly an average of 420,000 miles a year.

Yes, there are those in the medical community who would argue convincingly that jet lag is a recognized medical malady, and that I must be living in a perpetual state of jet lag. It is also argued that jet travel upsets our natural circadian rhythms. I, of course would argue that even if jet lag exists, then I've been lucky in being able to adjust to and/or control it. And in anticipating/adjusting, I've managed to more or less avoid it.

I still believe it is more a state of mind than anything else. Many travelers overthink jet lag, and prepare for days for the jet lag attack. There are jet lag diets, jet lag pills, jet lag exercise regimens.

And then, there's my approach, which I can tell you works for me and just about anyone else I've ever shared the philosophy. It has nothing to do with special diets, drugs or exercise.

But it's all about common sense.

First, don't eat much on the plane. Remember, most people don't eat airplane food because they're hungry (and that includes food you bring on the plane yourself). They eat food on planes because they're bored. And even on planes that serve food, keep in mind that there's a good reason that almost all airline food is cooked at least twice: It's almost impossible to maintain moisture at altitude. That may explain why it's almost always coated with that thick mystery sauce. Why eat that? If you do want to eat, do what I do. Bring fruit (in my case apples) and drink low/no sodium club soda or sparkling water.

Second, ...drink as much water as you can. But one important note: Try and buy your own bottled water once you clear security. I don't trust many airlines to serve me bottled water. In fact, a number of airlines that don't stock enough bottled water on their flights place their flight attendants in an awkward position. And in many cases, that results in the flight attendants refilling empty water bottles with the water carried in the plane's holding tanks. Talk about a bacterial breeding ground. (Flight attendants even have an appropriate nickname for that water —"tappian.") So, unless you see the flight attendant physically twist and then snap open a cap from the top of the bottle, don't drink it.

Third. If you feel like sleeping on the flight, then sleep. If you feel like working or watching the movie, that's OK too. Then, at least twice during the flight, avoid getting hit by the beverage cart, and at least make an attempt to walk around the cabin.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, it's what you do once the plane lands that will make the biggest difference in your battle to avoid jet lag. No matter what time you land, no

matter how long the flight, you MUST stay up until at least 11 p.m. local time. This is the most difficult, but also the most important, challenge you'll face. If you succumb to the temptation to take that 4 p.m. nap, no one will see you for three days — and that includes YOU! Almost inevitably, you'll feel sleepy around 2 p.m. on the first arrival day. Do not eat a heavy lunch. Stand up. Take a walk. Go out and shoot hoops if necessary, but do not take that nap. If you do, you'll find yourself awake at 3 in the morning watching bad ab-sizer infomercials.

Again, stay up until at least 11 p.m. (in my case midnight) and then hit the sack. Will you totally cycle? Most likely, you will average about five hours of sleep. But the second night, again staying up until 11 p.m., you will sleep your normal cycle.

Then, on your return flight home, repeat the entire process.

No diet. No drugs. No exercise program. And no jet lag.

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