Winning the Battle over Jetlag
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Many of us travel for a living or just for fun. Longer trips, especially cross-country or overseas, provide us with the "opportunity" to experience air transportation. We get to stand in long security lines, sit in cramped cabins, go without food or beverages for long periods and feel like a piece of freight. And, let's not forget the additional time required to get to and from the airport(s) and all the excitement of dragging along luggage. Is it any wonder with all this fun and exercise that our bodies rebel on us and shut down at the end of our travel? This shutting down is often referred to as "jet lag," which is a combination of fatigue and stress and typically manifests itself in the form of stomach uneasiness and a desire to sleep…for a long time! That's the bad news. The good news is that there are things that you can do to minimize jet lag. Here are some things that I have learned over the years as I have traveled around the world that may help you the next time you head off into the wide blue yonder.

- **Plan your trip.** You can reduce stress and conserve time and energy with a bit of advance planning. Do your homework on airports, weather, and destination locations and facilities/events before starting your trip. The internet has a wealth of information or you can contact your travel agent to get it from them.

- **Anticipate the Unexpected.** To prepare for unanticipated cancellations or trip interruptions, program your travel agent and airline's phone numbers into your cell phone for quick access. This can save a LOT of time and stress and get you ahead of everyone else trying to reschedule when there is a mechanical or other problem and you find yourself stuck at an airport.

- **Pack reasonably.** There are many helpful books on the market to help you minimize the need to pack your entire wardrobe and lighten you load. You will also reduce your stress by not getting to an airport only to find out that you have to either pay additional shipping for a bag or cannot take it aboard. Most airlines use a standard for carry-on bag size of 45-inches for combined depth, height and width. Weight is more of an issue with checked bags. Limits on domestic flights start at a maximum of 50 pounds a bag, with a two-bag allowance (although some airlines now charge for a second bag and have additional limitation), while international flights are lower. Always check with your scheduled airline(s) before going to the airport to determine their baggage requirements. And, don't forget to put all your liquids into a quart-sized baggie for easy processing by security when you get to the airport.

- **Carry on essentials.** If you have ever had a bag lost or know someone who has, you know what a hassle this can be. Even if the bag eventually

turns up, you experience the frustration, extra effort and inconvenience of recovering it. Take a small bag on the plane with you with a change of clothes, basic toiletries, any needed medication, valuables (e.g. jewelry or cameras), something to read or entertain yourself with during the trip and at airport layovers, and sealed beverages (water is best) and snacks/food. It is also a good idea for much longer flights to purchase a pair of noise cancellation earphones and an eye mask for sleeping. On international flights, I always carry along a cheap pair of disposable travel socks or slippers and take my shoes off during the flight. It is very relaxing.

- **Eat a good meal before boarding.** Since most flights do not provide food and give only limited beverages, you can help your body by giving it some fuel to make the trip. Don't overindulge or fill up on fatty junk food. Instead find an airport sit down restaurant where you can relax and get some fairly nourishing (albeit expensive) food.

- **Hydrate regularly.** Drink lots of water and remember that both alcohol and caffeine products tend to dry your throat and interfere with your metabolism. Alcoholic beverages are best avoided when flying.

- **Give yourself recovery time**. An easy way to allow your body to recover is to plan at least a day to catch up on sleep before meetings, presentations or getting into your vacation main events. I usually try to plan travel overseas so that I arrive mid-day or late afternoon. That way, I can sleep during a relatively normal cycle and get up the following morning relaxed and ready to go. An option is to travel at night, arrive in the morning, stay awake most of the day, get an early dinner and then get a good night sleep. It is usually best to try to stay with your body's normal routine, especially when changing time zones.

- **Get some exercise.** Before and after your flight you can reenergize your body with exercise. You can even do so during your trip by walking around the airport during layovers or doing anaerobic exercises while in your seat. Tightening and relaxing your buttocks, extending and relaxing your stomach, placing hands on the armrests and pushing down hard, then relaxing, pushing down on the floor with the soles of your feet and tightening leg muscles, then relaxing. All of these can stimulate blood flow to the brain and keep you alert and feeling refreshed.

With these tips, or others available on the internet, you are on your way to a successful and less stressful flight. Happy travels!

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