

THE WEEK

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# SMART *life*

LIVE HEALTHY, STAY FIT

**FITNESS FORMULA**  
**HOW MUCH IS**  
**TOO MUCH?**

**STAR FITNESS**  
**SECRETS**  
**REVEALED**

**10**  
**CANCER**  
**MYTHS**  
**BUSTED**

**SAVE OUR SPINE**  
**DITCH THE CHAIR**  
**GET ON FOOT**

**TREND ALERT**  
**OLIVE OIL IN**  
**DESSERTS**

**I WORK OUT**  
**PARINEETI CHOPRA**





# Time travel

Jet-lagged after a long, international trip?  
Here are ways to overcome it

BY SUJA NATARAJAN









**B**engaluru-based project manager Chirdeep Shetty has been a globetrotter since age 24. Like most travellers, he, too, suffers from jet lag. "Jet lag takes a toll on you when the sleep cycle gets affected. I suffer more when I travel eastwards. And it takes roughly about four days for me to recover," he says. Almost all long-haul travellers who fly across time zones grapple with one or more jet lag symptoms as the body finds it difficult to adjust to the changing time zone. Disturbance in the biological clock can wreak havoc on your physical and emotional health. While you cannot avoid a jet lag, you can alleviate it through natural methods.

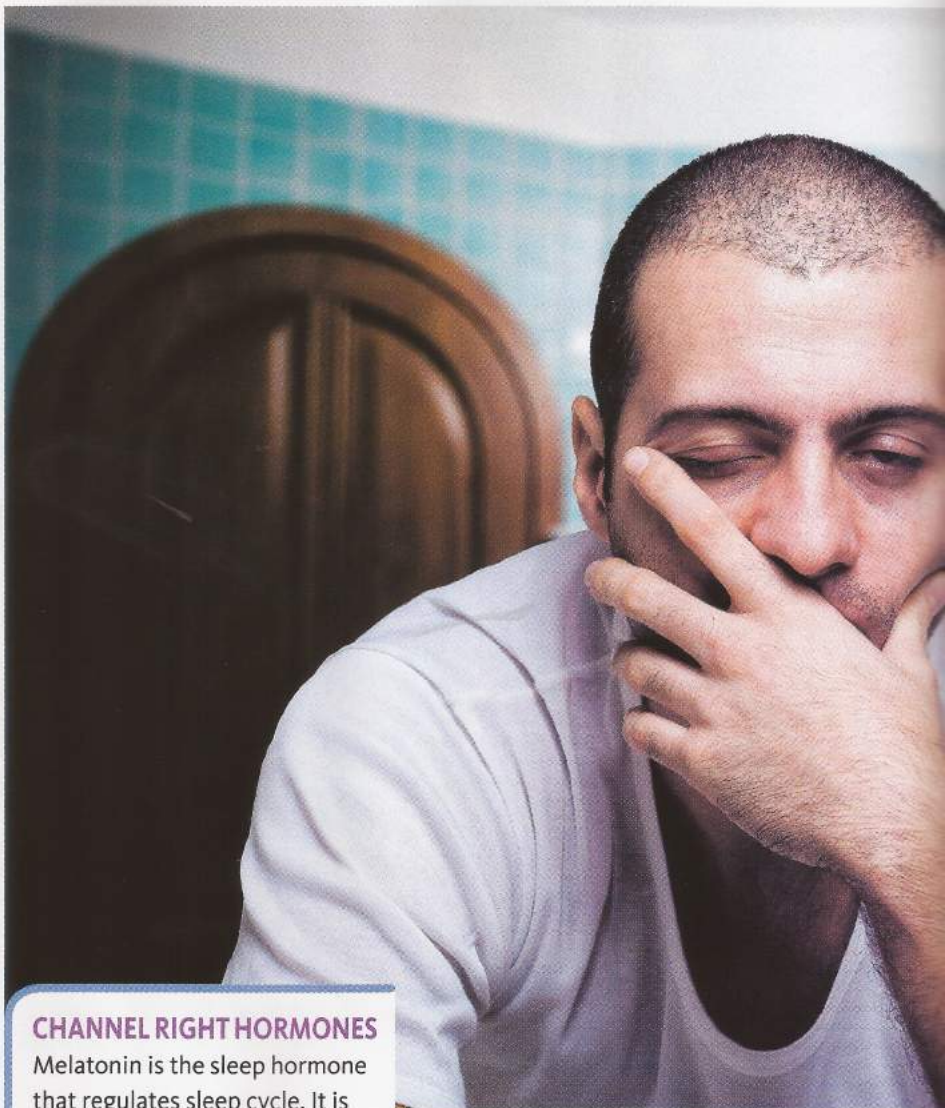
### Plane reason

Sleep loss, poor air quality, air pressure, sitting still for a long time, use of caffeine or alcohol worsen the symptoms of jet lag. "The body clock is used to a particular pattern of functioning in terms of food intake or physical activity. With the change in time zone, there is a shift in the daily pattern. Also, the oxygen capacity in an aircraft is very different than that at the ground or sea level. It, therefore, makes the brain a little more sluggish for the first few hours or days," explains Mumbai-based Malavika Athavale, consulting nutritionist at Eatrite.

Recovery from jet lag is largely dependent on age and physical fitness. While people of all ages suffer from jet lag, seniors and individuals with poor fitness take longer to recover.

### One direction

The symptoms worsen depending on the direction and the distance of travel. It is likely to be bad if you are flying eastward. Typically, it takes a day to recuperate for every time zone that



### CHANNEL RIGHT HORMONES

Melatonin is the sleep hormone that regulates sleep cycle. It is found in small amounts in meat, fruits and vegetables and is also available as a dietary supplement. Melatonin supplements reset the sleep cycle, which effectively aids in the reduction of jet-lag symptoms. There have not been many studies on the long-term effects of melatonin supplement. "There's still a lot of research being done on this topic. And not everyone uses it," says Malavika. Most experts suggest the use of natural remedies to decrease the effects of jet lag.

you cross. Travelling east causes more problems because you lose several hours and the body finds it hard to adjust as the body clock has to shrink its natural cycle. The body clock, however, is less confused when you travel westwards as you gain several hours, giving your body more time to adapt to the time zone.

### Show and tell

A person suffering from jet lag experiences symptoms within a day or two of travelling across different time zones. The severity and the type of symptoms vary from person to person. "When the sleep cycle kicks in at odd times, especially during a busy day, it's hard





to focus on anything. Even a simple conversation requires a lot of energy to concentrate, and when I wake up at odd times in the night, I feel hungry," says Chirdeep.

"The most common symptoms are fatigue, lack of sleep or insomnia, headache, tiredness, lack of appetite and in some cases, irritability and haziness or confusion," says Malavika. "Symptoms of jet lag vary and may depend on various factors like time zones, the direction of travel, the age of the person, health status, and more. Fatigue, depression, confusion, loss of appetite, irritability, attention problem, gastrointestinal disorders like diarrhoea and

## FOOD TO THE RESCUE

**Use natural food to overcome jet-lag symptoms. You can include them in your diet before, during and after the travel.**

**Lemon:** One of the most recommended food for tired travellers is lemon as it has properties to fight dehydration. "I drink lemon tea or simply hot water with lemon, sipping it all day long, which keeps me hydrated as well as helps avoid indigestion," says entrepreneur Sandip Vendagi. Apart from lemon, you can also try coconut water or electrolyte-infused drinks that will keep you energised and hydrated.

**Banana:** Traces of tryptophan, magnesium and potassium in banana promote better sleep pattern by increasing the level of serotonin—a brain chemical responsible for positive moods. Get a cup of warm milk or banana to induce sleep before you go to bed.

**Ginger:** Ginger is a time-tested herbal remedy to combat travel sickness. You can either drink it as tea or chew on a small piece of ginger if you can withstand the astringent flavour. If you are on a long, air travel, start taking it at least a couple of days before the journey and continue during the trip, if required.

**Tea:** Chamomile, peppermint, matcha tea are some of the best bedtime drinks that help you relax as they have anti-stress properties that aid good sleep. While peppermint helps in digestion, lavender, valerian and chamomile are good antidotes to stress. Mint tea is a natural remedy to fight indigestion, nausea, headache, depression, exhaustion and sleeplessness.

**Yoghurt:** Probiotic food like yoghurt has a good source of tryptophan that helps the brain produce melatonin, the sleep hormone that controls the sleep cycle. "Yoghurt is an easy-to-digest food and is helpful especially as a pre-flight snack. Along with fruits, it keeps me full and also gives me better sleep," says software consultant Shambavi Srikant. "Seeds such as sunflower, flax or pumpkin can be kept handy for munching during the flight for better sleep," says nutritionist Malavika Athavale.

**Herbs:** Smelling rosemary, lavender and basil keeps you relaxed, alert and awake when you are trying to adjust your sleep schedule.

## WORKOUT REMEDY

"Exercise brightens you and keeps you alert. You can feel refreshed if you do your regular workout before and after your flight. While doing exercises in the flight is not possible, walk up and down as many times as possible to allow constant blood flow," says Shwetambari Shetty, fitness instructor, co-founder and director, The Tribe-Fitness Club.

## INFLIGHT EXERCISES

- ◆ Stand with your feet apart, raise both arms up, bring the upper body down, bending at the hips. Hold it for eight to 12 seconds. Use the same bending forward action to the left and the right.
- ◆ Bring the arms forward, interlock and stretch the back. Take the arms back, interlock and stretch the chest.
- ◆ Bend the knee, hold the ankle and rotate it 15 times per leg.
- ◆ Stand with feet apart and legs straight. Raise one hand overhead with the other at the side. Stretch sideways reaching your hands overhead. Do 10 repetitions per side.



constipation are the typical symptoms," says Mumbai-based dietician, Ronia Thomas.

## Diet right

Ronia explains that it is important to manage diet to help reduce the symptoms of jet lag. Intake of protein has to be more, with small, frequent meals. High-protein meals keep the body's cycle active, and high-carbohydrate meals stimulate sleep.

"Protein and complex carbohydrate-rich food like eggs, beans, nuts, whole grains, pulses or dal-based food and lean meat are found to help. Avoid simple carbohydrates like juices, sweets or dairy," suggests Malavika.

## Water effect

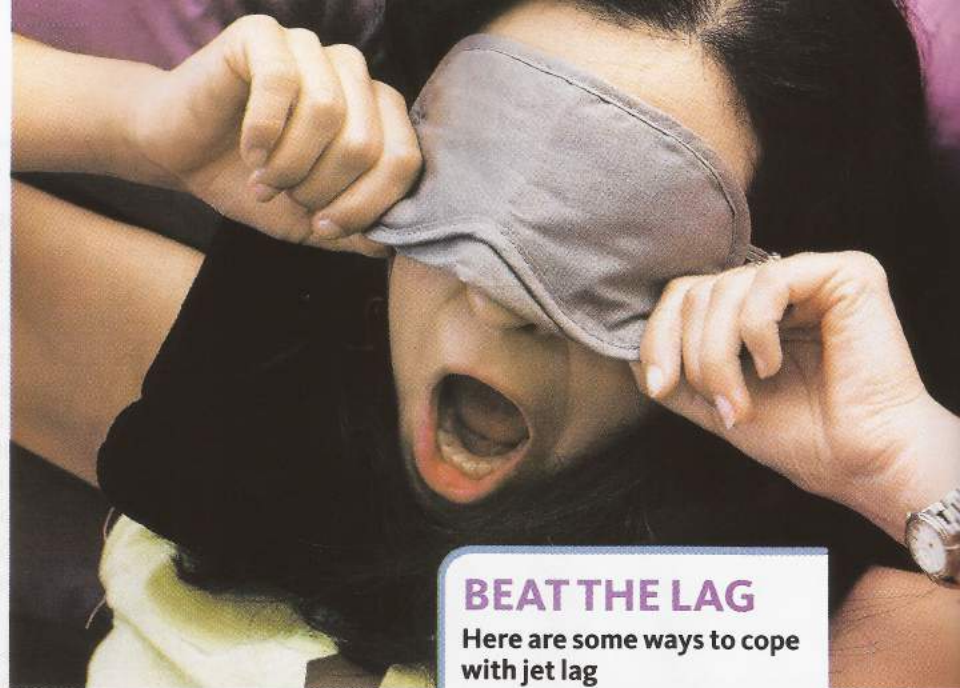
A dehydrated body makes you irritated, tired and exhausted. It is essential to keep your body hydrated as much as possible—before the departure, while in transit and after reaching the destination. "During your travel, make sure you have plenty of fluids to drink, preferably water to keep yourself hydrated. Alcohol or caffeine will not help your symptoms, but will make them worse," says Ronia. "Although drinking lots of water is a challenge for me, I consciously keep myself hydrated with room temperature water through the journey. This routine during flights has kept the headaches away," says Bengaluru-based marketing professional Anirudh Baronia.

## Strategic moves

Sleep deprivation can confuse feelings of hunger. You are prone to overeat, which could aggravate the symptoms. Keep your energy levels steady by opting for lighter meals that have the right balance of fruits, vegetables, proteins and complex carbohydrates. Opt for salads, soups, juices and fruits and avoid fats and calories.

## Fast to feast

Ronia suggests the alternate feasting and fasting technique (feast and fast



intermittently and break the final fast at destination) could be started four days before the travel date. The diet has alternate days of feasting enriched with proteins and carbs and fasting with salad, soups and broths. "The feasting and fasting diet is not terrible, as it seems. It's just one day of eating a lot and the next day, you cut down to salad and soup before the flight. As I suffer from constipation during long-hauls, eating light has helped me a lot," says software consultant Shambavi Srikant.

## Adjust sleep cycle

As sleep plays a crucial role in circadian rhythms, experts suggest tuning the body as per your destination. "When I am traveling from the US to India, I try not to sleep in the first leg of the flight, and then I have a good nap in the second leg before reaching India, which reduces the effects of jet lag," says Chirdeep.

"During my travels from Europe to India, I skip the inflight dinner, which is served around the time it is midnight in Paris. I try to focus on getting sleep, followed by a good breakfast to direct the body to adjust to the new schedule," says Chennai-based entrepreneur Sandip Vendagi.

Prolonged periods of sitting still on the plane and inactivity restrict the blood flow in the body, resulting in stiffness,

## BEAT THE LAG

Here are some ways to cope with jet lag

- ◆ Avoid meetings immediately upon arrival. Your body needs time to get acclimatised to the new schedule.
- ◆ Try sleeping naturally without medications.
- ◆ Adapt to the new time zone by going outdoors as much as possible and try to be awake until the local bedtime.
- ◆ Get regular exposure to light to adjust your body to a new location. Do not attempt to get to the new time zone right away, which can disturb your internal clock. Control the exposure to light by using sunglasses in the plane and for a few hours after arrival at destination.
- ◆ Get at least four hours of sleep on the first night of reaching your destination to train your body to the new time zone.

mental foggiess and muscle cramps. While there is food like watermelon, garlic, dark chocolate and goji berries that improve blood circulation, exercises give you the much-needed blood circulation and help to adjust the body clock. □