



MANAGING JET LAG



"We travel so much and often don't feel so good when we get to our competitions sites. This can go very wrong if we have a short time frame between traveling and competitions. This type of information is so important and should be learned by every elite level athlete."

Hannah Kearney, 2010 Olympic Gold Medallist in Moguls and overall moguls World Cup winner in 2008-2009



"Living on the road 6 months of year can really make life hard. Over the years we have learned a few key tips that have really help ourselves maintain our fitness and our attitudes. Having this type of information is really helpful to help us in reaching our optimal performances".

Johnny Spillane, 2010 Olympic Silver Silver Medallist in small hill, big hill and team event in Nordic Combined

As a member of the US Ski and Snowboard Teams, you will travel extensively throughout the world. National Team members view travelling 6 or more hours as a very common fact that just goes with the sport. However, one of the negatives associated with air travel for the international competitor is the feeling of fatigue that occurs when travelling across a number of time zones. This negative consequence is called "jet lag".

What is Jet Lag?

Jet lag is characterized by disruptions to the body's normal circadian rhythms which are commonly referred to as our "body clock". We have daily cycles for most of our biological functions including: sleep, metabolism, temperature, strength, alertness, heart rate, etc. In normal circumstances these rhythms show regular fluctuations consistently within a 24 cycle. Jet lag occurs when the body's different internal clocks become confused between the place of departure and the place of arrival. Typical symptoms include disrupted sleep, changes in mood state, loss of appetite, stomach upset, and disorientation. Symptoms tend to be more pronounced and last longer when travelling easterly rather than in a westerly direction, and will also be influenced by the number of time zones crossed. A time zone is considered to be a 1 hour time change from that of your original destination.

How will it affect you?

Naturally, not all athletes will be affected in the same way, or to the same degree, but some level of jet lag will be experienced by everyone travelling across international time zones. Regaining "normal" sleep patterns will typically take 1 day for every time zone you have changed. In other words, if you change 6 times zones it will normally take 6 days to get back to "normal". Experience has found that one symptom free trip is no guarantee of further immunity against jet lag. It also appears that young people tend to cope with time-zone transitions better than older people do. Finally, the more experience you have with traveling usually results in better adaptation to the time zone changes.

What can you do to minimize the impact of Jet Lag?

It is vital that you take steps to ensure you will be feeling as ready as you can be, as soon as you can be during and after you take a trip. The ability to do this is a skill which all national and international level athletes need to acquire. Here are a number of different ways to help you prepare for a trip.

- Prior to Departing
 - Adopt a positive mental attitude before getting on the plane. With the advent of personal in-flight entertainment units on most planes combined with some reading and generally sitting back and relaxing, even long flights can pass quickly. The key is to adopt a "passive" mind set. Do not let distractions around you cause unnecessary anxiety or tension, simply roll with the punches and don't let it get you down.
 - Stay as well hydrated as you can in the last 24 to 48 hours before you depart. Drink slightly more fluid than normal and avoid caffeine and alcohol as much as possible.
 - Schedule a long slow A1 session in the last 24 hours before you depart. The main benefits will be increased circulation and tiredness to assist you to sleep on the plane.
 - Focus on getting high quality sleep the last 48 hours before you depart. This means not leaving your list of "to do" items to the last minute.

- Plan out your travel kit. This includes making sure you have healthy snacks, a water bottle (to fill once you get into the terminal), Alka Seltzer immunity complex (to help maintain hydration and boost immunity), ear plugs, cold medicine, sleeping aids, etc.
 - Wear comfortable loose fitting clothing on the plane (e.g. tracksuit, polo shirt, etc.). Try and wear something that is easily removed in case you feel warm or uncomfortable.
 - Airlines will often accommodate athletes with aisle seating or seating near the bulkhead or emergency exits where there is more legroom but make these requests when actually booking the flight.
- **During Travel**
 - Switch your watch to the new time zone right away. Attempt to eat and sleep at the new time zones.
 - Hydrate! Drink 250 ml (8 oz) every 30 minutes while on the plane. Use a mixture of fluids. A virgin bloody mary will also be good due to the salt content.
 - Exercise! During the flight you should try to get up and walk around the cabin every couple of hours. Simple stretching exercises can be completed while in the seat or in the available space near toilets and the plane's galley. If there is a stopover for a few hours use this time to have a good walk around.
 - Avoid excessive alcohol as it will increase the rate of dehydration.
 - **After Arrival**
 - Stay hydrated. Take a water bottle with you everywhere and consume water throughout the day and grab a couple of pieces of fruit.
 - Try to stay awake. After a long flight it is normal to feel tired, even if you do all the things outlined here. However, you should try to avoid sleeping once you arrive. Make every effort to stay awake until at least 9.30 pm that night. Sleeping through the day may take the edge off of your tiredness but it will delay the resetting of your body clock. It is quite common to experience sleep disturbances during the first few nights resulting in waking at odd hours. If you do wake up don't get frustrated and anxious because you can't get straight back to sleep, this will only make you tense. If you can't get back to sleep after about half an hour try reading or watching a bit of TV for half an hour and just relax...you will go back to sleep. If you do take a nap, do it right before you exercise and do not sleep for more than 60 minutes.
 - Get out and do some light exercise. Once you have checked into the hotel get a feel for the lie of the land. Getting out into the local environment and sunlight is a particularly important way to help the body adjust. The important part here is getting into the sun light. Social interaction also appears to be an excellent way to get used to the new time zone.
 - Eat at normal meal times.
 - Ask your friends and family members to avoid ringing at a time that may well interfere with sleep patterns and avoid leaving mobile phones turned on at night when asleep. The best scenario is to inform your family members not to call, but that you will call them.

Final Note:

Realize that you will be tired for the first few days after you arrive at your new destination. You should not expect to be in prime form, even if you were in good form when you left. Most of the time, you will require at least a few days to get back up to speed. Unfortunately, experience has found that the first few competitions set the tone for the rest of the competitions in a series. It is important that you do not let results from the first few days off the plane hinder your confidence. Understand what is happening, don't let it get to you, and prepare for each game or event as best as you can.