

## Exercise Reduces Jet Lag

Jet lag is a physiological phenomena resulting from crossing one or more time zones. Jet lag originates in nerve cells of the hypothalamic region of our brain which regulate temperature, sleep, and timing such as circadian rhythms. This internal brain system does not react rapidly to changes such as skipping ahead several time zones. When timing is disrupted we experience the symptoms of jet lag. These are:

- Fatigue
- Insomnia
- Loss of appetite
- Disorientation
- Reduced concentration
- Reduced aerobic fitness performance
- Reduced anaerobic fitness performance
- Higher injury rates
- Reduced dynamic strength
- Stomach problems
- Joint swelling and stiffness
- Muscles pain and stiffness

If you take no special precautions, jet lag can be very unpleasant and last quite awhile. For every time zone you cross, it is estimated to require a full day to recover from jet lag.

New research has shown that exercise before, during the flight and after arrival can reduce jet lag symptoms and jet lag time. First, take good care of your self. Eat well, exercise, get plenty of sleep and stay well hydrated. There's no magic preflight jet lag exercise program. You can do cardio, interval training or weight training. Just do something with some intensity.

During the flight it is important for you to get up often and move around, doing simple stretches and exercises. Even easy movements like walking up and down the aisle, a few squats or some stretches will improve many jet lag symptoms. Exercise, too, is a regulator of the hypothalamic pituitary axis and it does so in a way that counteracts the functions of jet lag. Here are a few exercises you can do on flight:

**BENT KNEE RAISES.** Stand by the aisle and put your hand on a seat. Raise your knee up to your hip level several times on both sides.

**SQUATS.** Keep the same position and do a few sit down-stand up squats.

**SHOULDER SHRUGS:** With arms at side (seated or standing) roll shoulders in a circular movement, both front and back.

**NECK STRETCH:** Perform easy, gentle neck circles to the right and then to the left. (Sitting or standing)

**ARM REACHES:** Reach both arms straight above your head and hold. (Sitting or standing)

**WALKING:** Walk up and down the aisles a few minutes. You can vary your walk from a normal heel to toe walk, to walking on your toes or walking on your heels.

**UPPER BACK AND CHEST STRETCHES:** First squeeze your shoulder blades together and hold for a few seconds. This stretches the chest. Next give yourself a big bear hug and round your shoulders forward for an upper back stretch.

**RAISE YOUR HEART RATE.** Most of us may be too timid to jog in place in the aisles or jump. If you just want privacy to rev yourself up go to the lavatory and jog/jump. There's not much room but it works!

The above are only a few simple movements you could use during a flight. The effects of exercise on diminishing and shortening the jet lag symptoms are also useful post flight. Most individuals who cross several time zones feel tired, a little sick and disoriented post flight. Another moderate or higher intensity workout will help your brain shake off those post flight blues.

Exercise isn't the only way to relieve jet lag. Performing exercise together with the following simple measures would be more effective:

Get a full nights sleep several days before you depart

Stay well hydrated several days before and during the flight

Avoing significant amounts of alcohol or caffeine

During the flight, carry on light healthy snacks and eat one every 3 hours.

If you feel very tired, try to take naps of 30 minutes or less

Use earplugs off and on on the plane to give yourself a break from the constant noise and also use them if you take a nap.

Use light and dark to trigger wake cycles. If you are traveling across many time zones then you may want to use a light therapy device.

### About the Author

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Source: <http://www.healthcrazed.com>