

More and more I deal with athletes that are traveling across country or the world to compete and/or train. This next week I have over 15 different east coast athletes traveling out to Nevada for my training camp for example. These athletes will be traveling quickly (thanks to airplanes) across more than 2 time zones and will likely feel the effects of jetlag. While not competing these athletes have some expectation about their performance while at camp and want to enjoy themselves and feel good while there.

So, how do reduce the effects of Jet lag?

Well, first let's discuss what it is. I have mentioned it is caused by the traveling quickly across time zones but what actually is causing it? People don't get jetlag when they travel from Boston to Miami and that is almost as far as the west coast. **Jetlag is actually the significant disturbance of your sleep pattern** (sleep/wake cycle) this is usually accompanied by a disturbance in other biological processes. Since Boston and Miami are in the same time zone you will not experience jetlag traveling between the two.

What are the symptoms? Jetlag is usually identified by fatigue, excessive sleepiness, disorientation, lightheadedness, loss of appetite, gastrointestinal disturbances, insomnia and loss of the ability to concentrate. As you can see these symptoms would have major effects on a regular individual let alone an athlete trying to compete or accumulate large volumes of training in a short period without overtraining or getting ill. The reality is also that any plane travel is often accompanied by dehydration, stress and muscle stiffness and you can see why travel, in general, must be respected and addressed seriously if you are planning on having a great experience.

Most people don't realize that jet lag can occur with as little as 3 time zones and it doesn't matter if you are heading west or east and the more time zones you travel the more severe the effects can be.

So, how can you reduce the effects? Understanding that it is the disturbance of your sleep/wake cycle at the heart of the issue will help. So, there are two major recommendations - gradually shifting the cycle prior to travel you can be very beneficial and following some general travel tips can also assist in minimizing the effects.

Shift your sleep cycle – if traveling 3-5 time zones in either direction prior to traveling (a few days) start to gradually shift your Bedtime and Wake time closer to the time zone you are traveling to. So, in the case of heading west you want to stay up later and wake later and if traveling east you want to go to bed earlier and wake earlier. Remember, even a little bit of shift can help greatly reduce the symptoms. It also helps to get some light exposure for 30 min sometime in the 2 hours prior to bed. When you get to your destination start to gradually shift your Bedtime and wake time closer to your normal times and again get 30 min of light exposure in the 2 hours prior to bed. When traveling more than 5 hours in time zones I am sure it will be difficult for many to deal with surviving in the “real” world while shifting sleep cycles that dramatically but the more important the trip the greater the sacrifices.

General travel tips -Avoid dehydration. An airplane is a pressurized (to about 6000') and very dry environment (less than 15% humidity). Drink adequate amounts of fluids while flying. **Avoid inactivity.** Get up and move and stretch every two hours of flying. Rushing from one flight to the other can actually

be of benefit. **Limit Stress. Limit Noise.** Noise reduction head phones can be marvelous or foam earplugs. **Maintain good nutrition.** Try **brief naps** of 15-20 min can decrease sleepiness. **Takes notes** on what worked and use them again next time you travel.

Travel is often necessary for competition or for a needed break from training in inclement weather, like training camp. Limiting the effects of jet lag can help you avoid performance difficulties associated with the symptoms of this condition. We invest a lot in our sport and expect a lot from ourselves even in situation where we are under stress from travel. Use these tips to help give yourself a fighting chance and insure your invest of time, energy and money are well protected.



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