

Mentor and student information sheet

Jet Lag

“Jet lag is nature’s way of making you look like your passport photo.”

What is jet lag?

Jet lag comes from changes in your sleep pattern – medically known as your circadian rhythm. Every person has a different rhythm – teenagers may sleep 10 hours a night – senior politicians may get by on only six hours – no matter what your schedule is, your brain just gets used to sleeping and waking at certain times.

When you cross several time zones your body’s inner clock is no longer synchronised with the world around you; which means that it asks for sleep when the sun is shining or you find yourself staring at the ceiling of your hotel room at 3am feeling hungry!

China will be seven hours ahead of the UK when we arrive so the chances of you experiencing jet lag are high. Symptoms of jet lag are temporary and vary from person to person, commonly they include insomnia, irritability, feeling dizzy and disorientation. Your brain can adjust, but it takes time. Some regular long haul flyers acclimatise quickly, but first-timers may be left feeling dazed for a couple of days.

Avoiding Jet Lag

There is no cure for jet lag nor is there a way to completely prevent it, but there are ways to help avoid and alleviate some of the symptoms.

- In preparation for flying to China one way to cope is to start adjusting your inner clock three or four days before the flight. This means gradually altering your daily schedule while at home. Try going to sleep and waking up one hour earlier each day. This way you will slowly adjust your sleep pattern so the time difference will not be too much of a shock to your body.
- As soon as the plane takes off change the time on your watch to your destination time zone. Try to sleep on the plane if it is bedtime in your arrival city; even consider missing out on the in-flight movie if it helps you to adjust! Stay awake if it isn’t.
- While on the flight, try to walk along the aisle to exercise your limbs and stretch your muscles.
- Wear layered, comfortable clothing that allows you to move and also makes it easier to adjust your own temperature. If you cannot get comfortable your stress level will increase and you won’t get the rest you need.

- The dry atmosphere on a plane causes accelerated dehydration, and one factor of jet lag is just the body's stress response to drying out on the plane. Drink as much water and fruit juice as you can. Avoid caffeine as this will only make dehydration worse.
- Take along an eye mask, neck-rest, or earplugs and whatever else will aid you to sleep in the plane.

After you arrive

- When we eventually arrive in Ningbo although it will be lunchtime you will probably be feeling like going to sleep. Avoid this at all costs and try not to think about what time it is at home.
- It is important you shower to help re-hydrate and refresh your body.
- Get some exercise by walking outdoors and being in the sunlight. Sunlight is important as it will help reduce fatigue. The body's circadian rhythm, which determines when you sleep and when you wake, is controlled by a hormone called Melatonin. Melatonin release is linked to the amount of light there is. Basically speaking, when it is dark Melatonin is produced and this indicates to the brain it is time to sleep, when it is light Melatonin is inhibited and you are more awake. Therefore, during the day try and expose yourself to as much sunlight as possible to inhibit Melatonin production and help overcome tiredness. (Remember to use sun screen to avoid sunburn).
- Keep drinking plenty of bottled water (remember not to drink tap water in China).
- Go to bed earlier than normal and this will greatly assist you in waking up wide-eyed and bushy tailed for the start of the conference after breakfast on the Sunday.

It is possible to experience jet lag up to several days into the trip so help your body by keeping hydrated, getting lots of sleep and eating well.