



## **JET LAG OR SHIFT WORK – HOW TO COPE WITH DISTURBED SLEEP PATTERNS**

If you travel a lot, knowing how to deal with jet lag will help you cope better with the travel and enhance your performance.

Jet lag occurs simply because you are keeping your body awake when the signals the brain is receiving indicate to the body that it should be asleep. There is a place in the brain called the suprachiasmatic nucleus that responds to darkness, causing signals that ultimately cause the pineal gland to secrete melatonin, the sleep chemical.

So if you are awake at a time when the body thinks it should be asleep, then the signals get mixed up. Your hormones get confused and you become tired and don't function properly. After all, sleep deprivation is used as a form of torture.

### **Countering jet lag**

Jet lag is less severe if you travel westward in the direction of the sun. When you get to the other end, you need two nights of uninterrupted sleep to completely recover. The same is recommended for people doing shift work.

When you travel to a new time zone, follow the following advice:

- Live in the time zone you have arrived into. You could even start doing this when you get on the plane. Simply stay awake until it's the local time to go to sleep.
- It's safe to use melatonin tablets that your doctor can prescribe if you don't wish to take a sleeping tablet.

### **The safe use of melatonin for shift workers**

Shift workers are at increased risk of sleep deprivation, health problems and accidents because they are not getting enough sleep at the right time for their body to be asleep.

Inadequate sleep between the hours of 10pm and 8am due to shift work causes a reduction in the opportunity for the brain to make melatonin. It is in part the deprivation of melatonin, as well as increased inflammation, that causes some of the health problems related to shift work.

Melatonin is a safe natural supplement to take to help shift workers adapt as well as possible to the abnormal hours of being awake or asleep.

Apart from sleep disturbances, alcohol and NSAIDS also lower melatonin levels. Research has shown that melatonin gives the following benefits:

- Help with jet lag and sleep disturbances due to shift work
- Reduces cancers of the breast, colon, endometrium, lung and prostate

- Reduce age related macular degeneration, Alzheimer's disease, Huntington's disease, anxiety, depression, some chemotherapy side effects, gastrointestinal disturbances (colic, colitis, IBS, ulcers), migraine and perimenopause symptoms.

## **Recommended doses for melatonin**

The doses used in research have been up to 700mg. The doses used for cancer patients have been up to 50mg per day.

The suggested dose is 1mg, taken 30-60 minutes before bed. Increase by 1 mg every 2-3 days until the person can get off to sleep and wake refreshed. Most patients find that they need between 1-6mg to get a good sleep.

If you wake drowsy, take melatonin longer before bedtime or reduce the dose. A minority have no effect or experience vivid dreams. Vivid dreams should resolve if you reduce the dose and persevere for up to 3 weeks.

Whereas melatonin is safe to use concurrently with all antidepressants, some patients who are very depressed may become more depressed. These patients have to go slowly with dose increases.