



## Traveling with Kids: Jet Lag and Time Changes

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“When I stopped trying to find the magical hack for managing red-eye flights and jet lag — and accepted that it might just be a tough few days — that’s when I truly found joy and freedom in traveling with my kids.”

This is such a valuable sentiment from one of our most internationally traveled providers. Jet lag can be challenging. There is no perfect formula. But having a plan — and realistic expectations — can make a huge difference. While the first few days may feel off, most children adjust beautifully with time. Below are practical, evidence-based strategies to help.

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### What Is Jet Lag?

Jet lag happens when your child’s internal body clock (circadian rhythm) is out of sync with the new time zone.

Symptoms may include:

- Early waking or trouble falling asleep
- Irritability
- Fatigue
- Appetite changes
- Mild stomach upset

The rule of thumb:

It takes about **1 day per time zone crossed** to fully adjust.

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### Should You Shift Sleep Before You Leave?

Sometimes — especially for big time changes (5+ hours).

#### Traveling East (Bedtime Earlier)

Example: U.S. → Europe

Harder adjustment.

- Move bedtime **earlier by 15–30 minutes** per night for 3–4 days before departure.
- Morning light exposure helps.
- Avoid bright light late in the evening.

#### Traveling West (Bedtime Later)

Example: U.S. → Hawaii

Usually easier.

- Gradually move bedtime **later by 15–30 minutes** per night.
- Evening light exposure helps adjustment.

If travel prep feels overwhelming, it’s okay not to pre-adjust. Many families simply adjust once they arrive.

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## On the Plane

- Set watches/devices to destination time once onboard.
- Encourage sleep if it aligns with destination nighttime.
- Hydrate well (planes are very dry).
- Avoid large amounts of sugar.

For red-eye flights:

If kids sleep — great. If not — plan for a lighter first day on arrival.

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## Once You Arrive

Light is the most powerful reset tool.

- Get **morning sunlight** if trying to shift earlier.
- Get **late afternoon/evening light** if shifting later.
- Keep naps short (30–60 minutes max) the first 1–2 days.
- Aim for bedtime close to local time — even if it feels early or late.

Sometimes pushing through until an early local bedtime works better than multiple naps.

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## Can Medications Help?

According to guidance from the American Academy of Pediatrics:

### Melatonin

- May be helpful short-term for older children and teens.
- Best used for shifting sleep earlier (eastward travel).
- Use lowest effective dose.
- Not recommended for routine or long-term use.
- Talk with your PCP before use, especially under age 5.

### Diphenhydramine (Benadryl)

- Not recommended solely for sleep on flights.
- Can cause reverse reaction (hyperactivity) in some children.
- May cause next-day grogginess.

In general:

Medication is rarely necessary for healthy children. Sleep, light exposure, hydration, and patience work best.

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## Babies & Toddlers

Younger children often adjust faster than adults.

Helpful tips:

- Keep one familiar bedtime routine item (book, lovey).
  - Feed on destination schedule once arrived.
  - Expect some early waking — it improves in a few days.
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## Travel Vaccines & Travel Medicine

If traveling internationally, check vaccine recommendations early.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Travel Health website provides destination-specific guidance: [🔗 https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel](https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel)

Some destinations may require:

- Routine vaccine updates
- Typhoid vaccine
- Yellow fever vaccine
- Malaria prevention medication
- Traveler's diarrhea prescriptions

We offer **travel consultations**, including telemedicine visits, to:

- Review recommended vaccines
- Discuss location-specific risks
- Prescribe preventive medications if needed

Learn more here: [🔗 PAA Telemed Travel Med Visits](#)

We recommend scheduling travel visits **4–8 weeks before departure** when possible.

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### ♥ A Final Perspective

Jet lag is temporary. Memories are lasting.

Expect a few imperfect days. Build in flexibility. Plan lighter activities early in the trip. And remember — kids are often more adaptable than we expect.

Sometimes the most freeing mindset is simply:

This might be a little hard... and it's still worth it.