

Jet lag, also called Rapid Time Zone Change Syndrome, is one of a number of Circadian Rhythm Disorders . Circadian Rhythm refers to the “internal clock” through which our biological processes are regulated. There are patterns of brain wave activity, hormone production, cell regeneration, and other biological activities linked to this 24-hour cycle. Many things can disrupt our circadian rhythms such as: shift work, pregnancy, medications, changes in routine, and time zone changes.

Jet lag happens when one flies across one or more time zones. Most people need to fly across about 3 time zones before noticing symptoms. Jet lag does not occur on long trips by car or rail because the body is able to adjust in the length of time it takes to cross each time zone. Also jet lag does not occur when flying north to south because one is not crossing time zones. Jet lag can happen to anyone, and although one may feel terrible, it isn't serious, usually resolving in about 3 to 4 days.

Symptoms of jet lag may include: difficulty falling asleep and maintaining sleep, difficulty staying awake and maintaining focus, loss of appetite, and even changes in bowel function (constipation or diarrhea). Although jet lag is not something that was discussed in ancient Chinese medical texts for obvious reasons, acupuncture can be a very helpful in helping to manage the symptoms of jet lag. By examining the symptoms of jet lag according to an understanding of acupuncture energetic, we can see that the disruption of the circadian rhythm seems to be related to a disharmony in the Yin Qiao and Yang Qiao meridian systems. Energetically, the Yin Qiao and Yang Qiao meridians regulate our basic sleep-wake cycles. When Yin Qiao is disturbed, there is a tendency towards somnolence; and when the Yang Qiao is disturbed, there is the tendency towards insomnia. In the case of jet lag, it seems clear that both are disturbed. Considering that the Yin Qiao meridian also crosses over the abdominal region, changes in appetite and bowel function are not that surprising.

I have found that acupuncture is very helpful in treating jet lag; and I use a combination of auricular acupuncture and body points. The basic points I use in the ear are: Pineal Gland (T 5), Sleep Disorders 1 (SF 3), Sleep Disorders 2 (I 15) , Point Zero, and Shen Men. For the body points, I typically open both the Yin Qiao (KD 6, LU 7) and Yang Qiao (BL 62, SI 3). If there are disturbances in appetite and bowel function, I may use P6, ST 25, ST 36. I find herbal supplementation unnecessary. However, many of my patients have used melatonin with great success.

