

How to maintain your health while traveling

By Nancy Trejos, USA Today

When Colleen Hurley travels for work, she's often rushing to a meeting as soon as she gets off the plane.

A dietitian from California, she's got to be in top form when she visits clients, even if she's been on a plane for hours.

"It can be both physically and mentally exhausting – particularly when you spend hours on a plane – or sometimes for me even in the car, and then having to hit the ground running and go straight to a client meeting," she says.

Through the years, she's figured out ways to eliminate the stress of the road. She prepares for her meetings well in advance of boarding her flight. Midair, she takes a power nap. On the ground, she sticks post-it notes on her rental car dashboard with presentation points that she can glance at occasionally. She constantly refreshes her iPod playlist with podcasts that will entertain her during the little downtime she has.

Traveling frequently can take its toll on the mind and the body. USA Today Road Warriors, frequent travelers who, combined, rack up millions of miles a year on the road for business, say the biggest challenges they face are eating healthy, exercising regularly, sleeping well and missing loved ones back home.

"Being on the road can be energizing and enlivening. However, it can also be lonely, disorienting, and exhausting," says Stephanie Holdenried, an Oakland resident who works in the North America office of adventure travel company Explore Worldwide.

A study late last year by Carlson Wagonlit Travel found business travelers are often stressed out when they travel, especially when they feel they aren't making efficient use of their time, when their travel plans are disrupted and when they break their regular healthy habits. Stress levels increased with age and frequency of travel, the study found.

But even leisure travelers have to endure some stress on their way to that carefree vacation spot. Traveling is anything but relaxing, with long security lines at airports and uncomfortable seating on planes.

"Travel is inherently more difficult than it was back in the day," says David Gee, a Minnesota-based speaker who helps train salespeople. "The whole TSA thing is a nightmare, and the stress level of people today is exponentially higher. And that adds to my stress."

Hotels and airlines increasingly encourage travelers to stay sane and healthy on the road. United Airlines, for instance, now awards frequent fliers miles for joining a gym or purchasing health and fitness products through GlobalFit, which has 10,000 gyms nationwide.

In addition to fitness centers, Marriott's Residence Inns have pools and whirlpool spas. They also have complimentary evening socials to help travelers unwind.

To help travelers relax even more, IHG's Crowne Plaza has a Sleep Advantage program with soft bedding, aromatherapy kits and quiet zones where no housekeeping or engineering can take place from 9pm to 10am Sunday through Thursday.

Ritz-Carlton hotels across the country are introducing healthier spa menus. Kimpton hotels will soon have yoga mats in every room.

Holdenried says she often takes advantage of any hotel amenities that will help her feel healthier while traveling.

“I will treat myself,” she says.

To stay fit, she always seeks out hotels with pools or yoga studios nearby. She tries to stay somewhere close enough to her appointments so she can walk, and she’s always scoping out scenic routes for walking or running.

Other Road Warriors say they’ve figured out their own tricks for staying grounded while traveling. **Here are some of their tips for relaxing and recharging on the road:**

Plan well: Come up with daily itineraries so you’ll know where you’ll be and what you’ll be doing most of the time. Surprises may pop up, but you’ll still feel as if you have some control of your trip. Make lists if it helps you feel organized.

“Spontaneity is great, but having a bit of structure helps a lot,” says Carolyn Scott-Hamilton, who started the Web series The Healthy Voyager.

Pack healthy snacks: Always carry back-up food in case you can’t find anything healthy to eat. Think fresh or dried fruits, almonds, trail mix, kale chips, protein bars, soy chips, cereal and plenty of water. Staying hydrated is key.

Tom Holland, president and founder of fitness company TeamHolland, packs a small separate bag with healthy goods such as oatmeal and energy bars. “This really makes a difference and prevents late-night trips to the vending machine,” he says.

Eat healthy meals: Hotels are now offering healthier food in their restaurants, room service menus and even minibars. Walk through most major airports, and you’ll see as many salad bars as burger joints.

But you’re not going to have all your meals at your hotel or the airport. Do some research before you head to your destination, and find out what healthy food options are around

you. Before you go to a restaurant, study the menu online to see if there's anything you can eat. Don't be afraid to go to a restaurant and ask the chef to prepare you a lower-calorie meal.

Go easy on the booze. "Cocktails provide tons of empty calories, are dehydrating, make it difficult to be on your A game if you're hung over, and let's face it – you don't want to embarrass yourself in front of your clients," says Hurley, the frequent traveler.

Don't skip the workout: Hotels have gotten into the fitness craze in recent years. Fitness rooms have gone from glorified closets to full-on gyms in many cases. But sometimes, there's no time for the gym.

Holland says he always travels with rubber exercise bands so he can get in a workout in his room or just about anywhere else. Exercise videos are also abundant online. If all else fails, you can take a long walk.

Keep in touch with loved ones back home: Technology has made everyone more connected. Lonely? Videocalling services such as Skype, FaceTime, Tango and ooVoo will let you see friends and relatives every day if you'd like to.

Denise Antoon, founder of public relations company Antoon Group, says the hardest part of traveling is being away from her three sons, ages 18, 6, and 4.

"I make every effort to not miss anything important with my kid's schedules like a game, birthday or school event." she says. But when she is away, she'll call or Skype them every day. "It is important for me to not make them think work is the priority over them."

Don't take your work to bed: Replaying the events of the day will only keep you awake. Tune it out, and spend some moments concentrating on yourself. Meditate, take a hot bath or

shower, listen to music, watch your favorite TV show. Avoid the Blackberry or iPhone.

“Don’t look at tomorrow’s schedule right before going to bed,” Hurley says.