

## ADJUSTING SLEEP

# Don't let jet lag steal days from vacation

## HEALTH CLINIC



CLARE ROWSON, MD

**Q:** I am planning a trip to Europe soon. Like many others, I have trouble with jet lag so I do not enjoy the first couple of days. Do you have any tips for getting over it sooner?

**A:** The problem we have with jet lag when visiting Europe is compounded by the fact that most overseas flights take off from Canada in the evening. Therefore unless you are one of those lucky people who can sleep on planes, you are up for about 36 hours.

However tempting it may be to take a nap as soon as you arrive, it is better if you can hang on until evening. Try to eat meals as close as possible to the time you would eat at home. Some people keep their clocks and watches at the home time.

Dealing with the body's natural circadian rhythms is also a problem for shift workers on rotating shifts. Performance is affected and jet lag may even have a negative effect on the heart and circulation.

Some people seem to have more of a problem than others. Young people and children generally adjust faster. This is why shift work, particularly overnight, may be damaging to the health of those ages 45 and older.

One of the key factors seems to be related to the naturally occurring hormone cortisol.

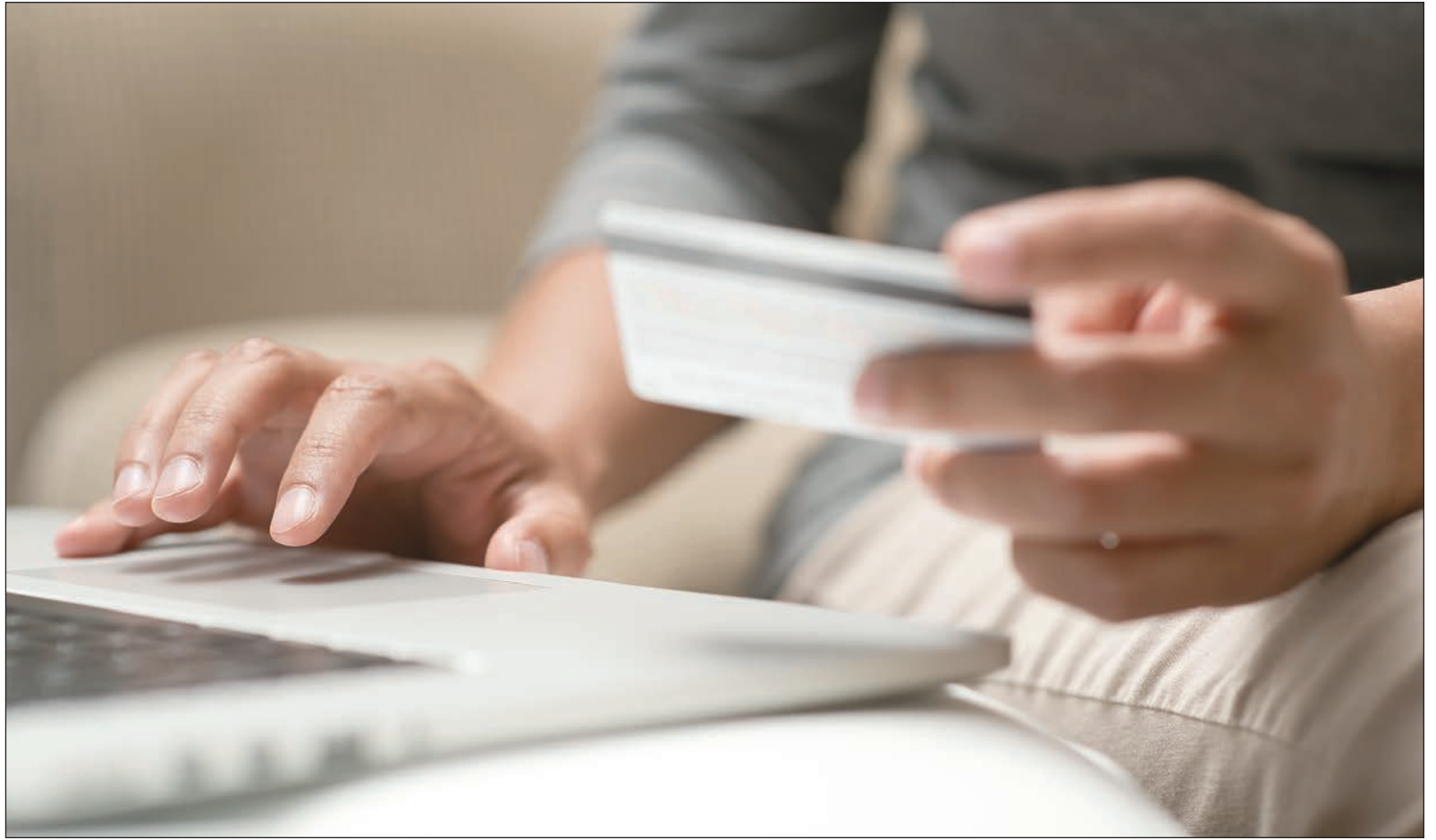
Researchers at McGill University in Montreal have shown the importance of cortisol in circadian rhythms. This substance was found to influence the clock genes in white blood cells, which in turn communicate with the central body clock in the brain and also other clock genes in other organs.

Other studies have demonstrated that light therapy is not useful for treating jet lag and may be damaging. The solution, according to the Canadian researchers, may lie in a pill that is yet to be developed, possibly combined with light therapy.

## MORE PREVENTION TIPS

- Reduce exposure to bright light to help adjust to the new location.
- Drink plenty of water before, during and after your flight to counteract the dehydrating effects of dry cabin air. Avoid alcohol and caffeine, which can affect your sleep.
- Exercise to boost your endorphins and stretch out some of the kinks from a long flight.

Clare Rowson is a retired medical doctor in Belleville, Ont. Contact: health@producer.com.



FILE PHOTO

## TRAVEL PROGRAMS COMPARED

## Are travel reward programs worth the effort?

## TALES FROM THE ROAD



ARLENE &amp; ROBIN KARPAN

**T**he ads make it sound enticing. Collect these points and before long you'll be jetting off to some exotic corner of the globe. But is it really that simple?

Effectively using points programs can reduce travel costs, often dramatically, but it's seldom simple. Many programs are so complex that they make the Income Tax Act look simple.

It helps to learn the ins and outs of the main programs and how to use them to your benefit. It also helps not to get too hung up on concepts like logic and common sense.

There's a mind-boggling number of points schemes, each with its own pros, cons and exasperating idiosyncrasies. Traditional frequent flyer programs such as Aeroplan or Delta Skymiles are operated by most major airlines.

We've found that these generally give the biggest bang for the buck for long international flights. It's mainly because the points required are for travel between broadly defined regions such as North America or Europe rather than actual distance, with a few exceptions.

So if we want to travel from Saskatoon to Europe or Africa, it costs us the same number of points as someone living in Toronto or New York, even though we have to travel a lot farther. It's a rare instance where the travel industry doesn't penalize us for living in a smaller market.

The downside to most airline programs is availability. They allocate a limited number of seats for award redemptions, so you can't always

find space on the days you want. If you're flexible and can plan ahead, that's better.

A free ticket is never free. You still have to pay fees and taxes, which can vary. Most are imposed by airports or governments.

But the big one that travellers should be aware of is the fuel surcharge that some airlines sneak in as an additional fee on award redemptions, especially on international flights.

Fortunately, not all airlines do this. With Aeroplan for example, you can use any of the 27 airlines in Star Alliance, providing that award space is available.

Some airlines impose a fuel surcharge on Aeroplan tickets, including Air Canada, Lufthansa and Thai Airways, while some don't, such as United, Singapore Airlines, Swissair, and Turkish Airlines.

Which airline you fly internationally can make a huge difference in fees.

How we accumulate points has changed dramatically. It used to be that flying 1,000 miles earned 1,000 points. With most airlines now, travelling on a discount fare might get you 50 percent or even 25 percent of the points.

Some airlines, such as Delta, no longer award points based on distance flown, and instead base it on what you spend. The cheaper the ticket, the fewer the points.

The main way to rack up points these days is through credit cards, with increased competition resulting in some attractive deals such as significant sign-up bonuses. There are now three banks (TD, CIBC, and American Express) that have Aeroplan credit cards.

Other Canadian banks have cards linked to airlines such as Westjet, Delta, British Airways or Alaska Airlines. These usually come with an annual fee, although they sometimes offer special deals such as first year free.

Some reward programs are credit-card based, and not linked to airlines, such as CIBC's Aventura or RBC's Avion. Practically every bank has something similar.

The main selling point is that you can use points on any airline. While rules vary, the number of points required is usually tied to a maximum ticket price, so they aren't without restrictions.

Then there's the ubiquitous Air Miles program. You need a lot of points to get very far, they charge booking fees for everything (even if you book online), and reward flights are restrictive.

We have trouble getting enthusiastic about Air Miles, although many people use them successfully.

Credit cards are linked to Air Miles as well.

As long as the traveller uses credit cards for normal spending and business expenses and pays the full balance every month, this can be an excellent way to accumulate points.

A farmer paying a fuel or fertilizer

bill, for example, can quickly earn a truckload of points.

There is no single best program. It all depends on what kind of trip you have in mind.

For an international flight in business class, one of the airline programs will likely be best, whereas Air Miles might fit the bill for a short hop one province away.

The key is to understand each program's benefits and limitations and then decide which suits your travel goals.

Numerous websites are devoted to points travel. One we find useful is rewardscanada.ca. Besides daily updates, they do an annual rating of the best credit cards in Canada for points earning.

To delve even deeper, check out flyertalk.com, which has discussion forums on practically every airline and points program out there.

Arlene and Robin Karpan are well-travelled writers based in Saskatoon. Contact: travel@producer.com.

**Do you agree that by keeping money on the farm, aggressively managing farm input costs builds local communities?**

