

Nutrition on the go

Eating healthy while travelling for business



Ensure you get the right nutrition when you're travelling for business with advice from preparation and navigating hotel buffets to useful apps and tackling tiredness

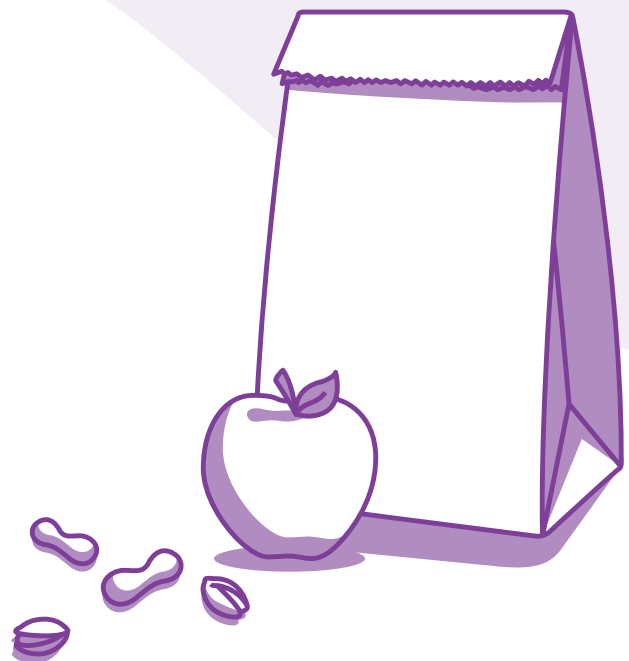
Setting up and sticking to healthy habits can be challenging at the best of times. Healthy nutrition, regular exercise and stress-reducing behaviours all take time, knowledge and commitment. We know [that 82 percent of expat employees](#) either feel they should make a conscious effort to stay fit and healthy, or make an effort at least some or most of the time, but what about when they travel for work?

For the globally mobile among us who travel – and especially fly – frequently, the challenges of maintaining healthy habits can be more pronounced – and that's without mentioning the impacts of frequent flying itself which can include isolation, fatigue, dehydration, viral illness, respiratory issues, deep vein thrombosis and even cosmic radiation.

Read [Frequent fliers: Maintaining the health of your globally mobile workforce](#) for more information on the impact of frequent business travel.

Nutrition is an important area of health that can be restricted by disruptive timings and limited access to healthy food options. This can include unhealthy meal options on planes and be exacerbated by limited knowledge of local cuisine at the destination. The cumulative effects of this on those who travel frequently can have a damaging effect on overall well-being – both physical and mental.

This article gives regular travellers useful advice on how to maintain good nutrition while travelling whether nationally or internationally – in trains, planes or automobiles.



1. Prepare

Preparing for the dietary aspects of your trips is a key part of maintaining good nutritional health. By knowing when you're going to travel and what might be available there and along the way, you can plan healthy options or take them with you. For example, you can make packed lunches at home to avoid packaged/processed meals and take healthy snacks such as fruits, nuts and raw veg to avoid crisps and chocolate bars.

Dr Lori Stetz, Senior Medical Director, Aetna International says, "[Two large European studies](#) have recently been published by the *BMJ* linking highly processed foods with risk of cardiovascular disease and death. The highly processed foods include packaged baked goods and snacks, fizzy drinks or sodas, sugary cereals, ready meals containing food additives, dehydrated vegetable soups, and reconstituted meat and fish products. It's because these foods are often high in added sugar, fat, and/or salt, but lack vitamins and fibre. There are so many healthier alternatives available and it just requires a bit of planning to work them into your trip."

Use the internet to research healthy options where you're going rather than stumbling into the nearest fast food outlet to your hotel or meeting venue. By preparing, you can take control of what you eat and when, despite heading into the unknown...

But, if you're flying internationally, take the time to research which foods you are and aren't allowed to

take with you. For example, the EU does not allow any meat or dairy products from outside the EU to enter.

There are many great apps that can help those who travel for business get the right nutrition, for example

- [Healthyout](#) can help you find healthy restaurant meals near you
- [Foursquare](#) is similar, and lets you find the best places to drink and eat around you based on your location and lets you filter restaurants by type – sushi, vegetarian, etc.
- [Fooducate](#) can help you build and maintain a good diet based on food quality, not just calories
- [MyFitnessPal](#) lets you see the nutritional information for thousands of meals and even specific products from shops so you can check the nutritional information of what you're eating when you're in the supermarket or a restaurant.
- [Can I Eat It?](#) tells you whether a given dish in a given situation is safe to eat.

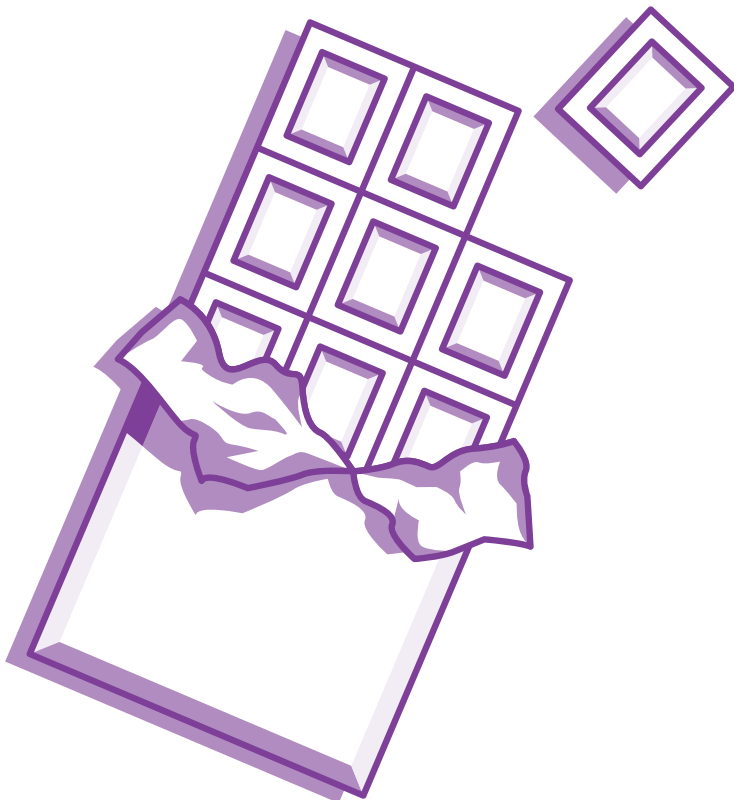
2. Snacking

Snacks have a bad reputation but grazing on healthy snacks is a good way of maintaining energy levels. Pack more [snacks](#) than you think you need but avoid empty calories – those high in fat and sugar, but low in other nutrients, for example sweets, biscuits, cake and crisps/chips/fries.

When travelling, take or seek out the following smart snacks:

- Fresh fruits
- Cut vegetables
- Trail mix
- Nuts or seeds
- Beef jerky (find sugar-free varieties)
- Popcorn
- Protein or energy bars/balls

By taking healthy snacks, you don't need to feel guilty if you eat them, and especially those with high levels of protein can help you stay full if your mealtimes are disrupted by travel.



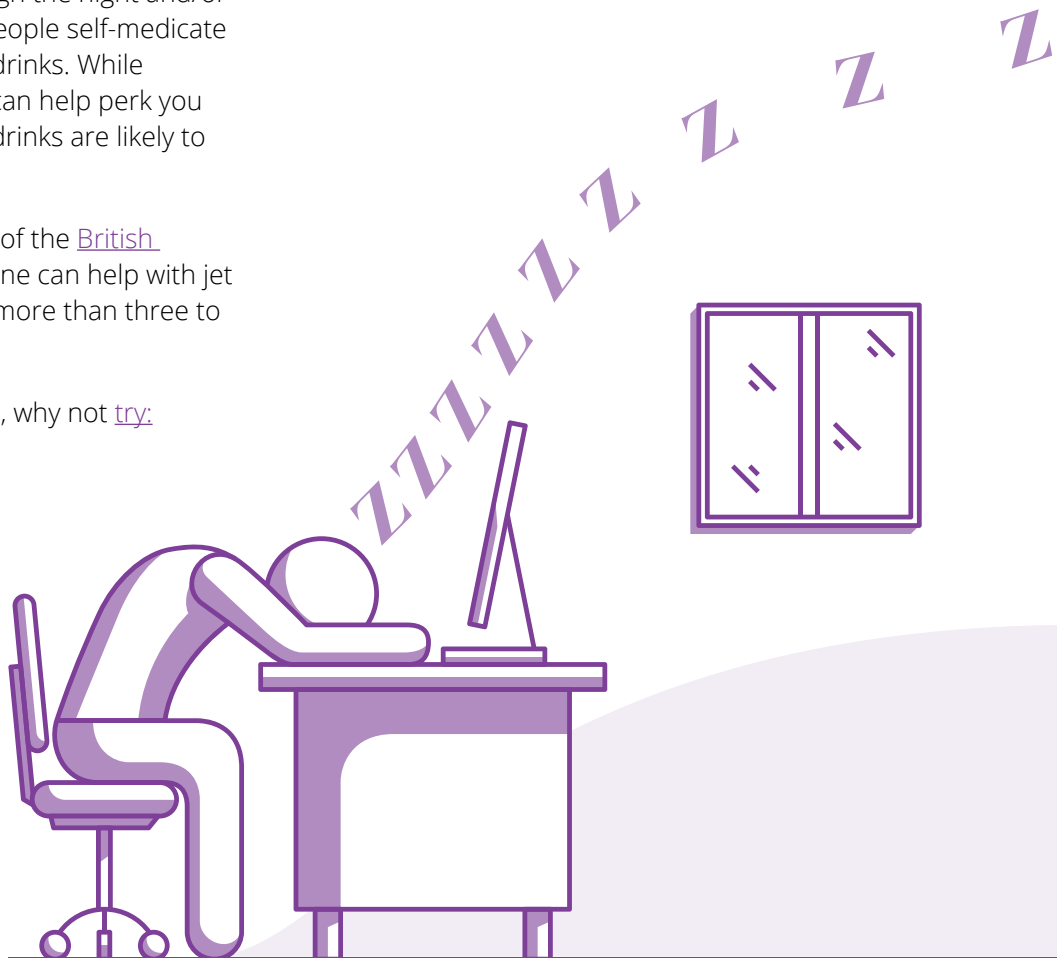
3. Tackling tiredness

Tiredness is a common effect of frequent travel, especially when travelling through the night and/or to different time zones. Many people self-medicate with caffeinated and/or sugary drinks. While moderate amounts of caffeine can help perk you up after a long journey, sugary drinks are likely to set you up for a crash.

Consultant dietitian [Sian Porter](#) of the [British Dietetic Association](#) says: "Caffeine can help with jet lag, but you don't want to have more than three to five cups of tea or coffee a day."

If you're in need of a pick me up, why not [try](#):

- Snacking
 - Blueberries
 - Bananas
 - Apples
 - Goji berries
 - Yoghurt
 - Oranges
 - Water
 - Dark chocolate
 - Flax seeds
 - Nuts
- Within meals
 - Avocados
 - Leafy green vegetables
 - Fatty fish
 - Brown rice
 - Sweet potatoes



Dr Stetz says, "[Research](#) suggests that a cup of blueberries a day is just as good for reducing your risk of cardiovascular disease as they are for boosting short-term memory. Blueberries provide natural glucose sugars and vitamins and minerals. But as with everything, eat them in moderation."

It is important to say that even healthy pick-me-ups aren't a substitute for time spent in the fresh air and sunshine, or a good night's sleep – and caffeine and sugar can inhibit this. Ensuring you get regular healthy sleep will help mitigate tiredness on the road. [Read 10 tips for better, healthier sleep.](#)



4. Planes

As discussed in point 1, preparing food for flights can help you stay healthy, rather than eating less healthy in-flight options. On some airlines you might be able to request low-calorie or vegetarian meals, and don't forget that you can always say 'no' or eat around the unhealthiest items on the menu.

When Senior Medical Director, Dr Lori Stetz travels, she says, "I always take fruit-and-nut bars in my carry-on bag. They provide the protein, healthy fats and fibre I need, and I can choose the ones with the right calorie levels for me. On most trips, I take an apple or an orange as well for their water and vitamin C content."

5. Airports

See point 1 for advice on preparing meals and snacks for travel. If you haven't prepared anything to eat along your journey and find yourself looking for a healthy option in the departure lounge, aim for the following:

- A big bottle of water
- Lean, protein including hard-boiled eggs and unprocessed meats
- A salad
- Oatmeal/porridge – even if it's not breakfast time
- Smoothies
- Yoghurt.

It must also be said that some of the chains in airports do offer nutritious options with high vegetable/complex carbohydrate content and low fat/sugar, so it's worth asking in vendors for options such as whole-grain oatmeal and garden vegetable soup.



6. In country

Dr Lori Stetz has advice for those tempted to discard their healthy habits while they're away; "According to an [On Call International](#) study, 44 percent of professionals are more likely to indulge in unhealthy foods while on a business trip than while at home. It's absolutely fine to have the odd treat, and don't give yourself a hard time if you do but try to make the best choices you can 80 percent of the time and you'll be helping to keep your habits on track."

Arriving at strange times in a strange country or even city can mean getting the right nutritional balance is a challenge – especially if you don't know the local cuisine. As point 1 says, research your destination: find out what local dishes are healthy and where you can buy them, or, find outlets that serve 'international food' if you're not keen on the local food. In restaurants, look for words on the menu such as: grilled, steamed, baked, roasted, poached and broiled to avoid accidentally ordering deep-fried foods. Remember, you don't have to eat everything on your plate, and if you're not sure how big your portion will be, start small because you can always order more.

A great way to ensure you get the nutrition you need is to head to the supermarket where you may be able to find familiar food options as well as fresh produce.

7. Hotels

Some hotels have limited meal options or have kitchens that might be closed when you arrive or want to eat. If you arrive during the day, a great strategy for taking control of what you eat, is to head to a local supermarket to build a healthy 'hotel picnic' you can eat in your room. Ask for a room with a kettle and a fridge if you're staying for a while so you can store cold goods and make up porridge/oatmeal and low salt/sugar instant soups, such as miso. This will also equip you to tackle hunger pangs healthily.

The hotel breakfast buffet can be a dangerous temptation with all-you-can-eat options including everything from donuts and pastries to fried breakfasts. This encourages unhealthy choices and over-eating. Just eat what you would eat at home. It might be free but overindulging regularly has a cost to your health.



8. Avoid food-related illness

As well as taking in important nutrients for a balanced diet, you can take steps to mitigate illness and discomfort due to strange or tainted foods and even the bacteria in water, by taking a daily probiotic. This will help to stabilise your digestive system and ward off bacterial reactions in your gut.

Quick advice

- Take travel-friendly cutlery so you can eat more widely at your destination and not rely on packaged foods and restaurants
- Stick to your routine and eat like you're at home
- Only eat when you're hungry
- Stay hydrated – take and drink water
- Don't drink or eat to aid sleep
- Eat protein with every meal
- Don't skip breakfast
- Avoid processed foods – especially processed meats
- Exercise mindful eating. Read [How to eat healthy at work: 7 healthy eating tips for the office](#)



How Aetna International can help

Aetna International's CARE team serves as a single point of contact, helping Aetna International plan members access the care they need. This includes arranging admittance to hospital, identifying specialists as well as providing advice from medical experts so we can help support you with advice on how to build and maintain a healthy diet.

For more information on the end-to-end health and wellness support services available for members, please contact one of our expert sales consultants.

[Click here to read more about how the CARE team can support you and your personal health goals.](#)



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