

# Travel, Nutrition and Performance for Dancers

**By Mhairi Keil**

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Jet lag can effect individuals in many ways – tiredness, poor mood, reduced motivation, loss of appetite, irregular bowels etc. Even travel within the UK can cause fatigue and will impact on your normal dietary habits. The best way to cope with such disruptions is to plan and prepare as best as possible to minimise the potential impact that travel can have on your well being and performance. These tips below offer some guidance on how to eat well whilst on the go and how to arrive at your destination in as optimal physical condition as possible.



*Chloe Derry and Jack Ramone by One Dance UK, Dani Bower*

## TRAVEL WITHIN THE UK

The stress and fatigue caused by being on the road is intensified by living out of a suitcase and eating on the go. Make sure you do everything you can to provide your body with the energy and nutrients it needs to perform at your optimum and recover well from an intense training and performing schedule. Eating well whilst on the go doesn't have to be difficult. Try any of the following:

- Travel with a cool box/bag and use ice from hotels in a tupperware box or sealed bag to keep food cold. Choose sushi trays, fresh salad, meat and fish components from health stores and supermarkets, and combine with fresh baked bread or pasta salads.
- Purchase ready cooked mixed grain or lentil packs e.g. Merchant Gourmet or The Food Doctor, and add some tinned fish, ready to eat prawns or smoked mackerel.
- If possible, travel with a microwave and make use of supermarkets, fresh soups, Innocent smoothies veg pots, or cook porridge or scrambled eggs
- Travel with a hand blender and make smoothies using fresh/frozen fruit, yoghurt, milk and fruit juice, that can all be stored in your hotel room fridge and/or cool box/bag
- Travel with a kettle and make use of sports foods e.g. Sports Kitchen high protein meals and porridge pots, or make a couscous salad by adding some fresh baby spinach and tomatoes, with some lean protein
- Select your restaurants carefully and try to make good nutritious choices. It is very easy to consume high energy intakes and low nutrient foods, resulting in poor muscle recovery and weight gain. Many restaurants will cater for your specific requirements, if you ask.

## TRAVEL OUTSIDE THE UK

It can take up to a day to recover from each time zone crossed. Depending on your destination, it is highly likely that you won't have time for a full recovery. Make sure you do everything you can to arrive in the best shape possible and ready to perform.

### **Appropriate snacks for the flight:**

- fresh and dried fruit
- savoury seed mix and mixed nuts
- carrot sticks and hummus
- pretzels or crackers
- protein bars

These may be more expensive at the airport so go prepared! Remember you don't have to eat everything you buy.

### **On the day of travel:**

Eat a good balanced meal before boarding the plane and make sure you have a large bottle of fluid for during the flight. The foods provided by the airline may not suit your tastes. Pre-empt this and buy foods to supplement your main meal:

- sandwiches, wraps
- salads
- pasta, couscous pots

Don't eat these in addition to the meals on the plane, you are not training and your energy intake should reflect this.

### **During the flight:**

- Adjust your watch to the new time zone and start to adopt sleeping and eating patterns in line with this new time zone. This can be difficult with airlines feeding schedules, but leave your tray down and inform the staff that you would like your food left out for when you wake.
- Dehydration incurred during the flight will have an impact on immune function, bowel movements and jet lag. Keep your water bottle in sight to remind you to drink. Avoid drinking lots of caffeinated drinks and avoid alcohol altogether. 1-2 cups of coffee/tea is ok, as long as you are drinking plenty of water and other low energy fluids. Bring some fruit or green tea bags to use.
- Wear flight socks or compression garments if you have them, throughout the flight to help reduce muscle stiffness and the risk of deep vein thrombosis, or the formation of blood clots.
- Mobilising your joints, walking and stretching regularly throughout the flight, is vital to help reduce joint stiffness/swelling and muscle tightness.

### **For use on the aeroplane, bring with you:**

Food, antibacterial hand foam, water bottle (empty), earplugs, eye masks, flight pillow, flight socks and appropriate entertainment (ipods/pads, books, cards etc. )

Sports supplements can be useful back up options to have available in case the food at your destination doesn't fully meet your requirements, as a pre show snack to provide energy whilst also feeling light, as a recovery meal after performances, to supplement protein needs or to assist with hydration. These should not be used to replace meals and healthy eating.

## **WHILE ON TOUR**

When travelling across time zones, light exposure is one of the key aspects that influences the body's ability to adjust to the new time zone. Healthy food choices, scheduling of meals and snacks around busy touring schedules, staying hydrated and optimising rest, will also help to minimise physiological disruptions and maximise performance.

### **On arrival:**

Dehydration and lack of fibre can disrupt bowel movements for several days on arrival. This can make you feel uncomfortable, heavy and bloated. To avoid this, drink plenty of fluids and eat some fresh fruit/vegetables throughout the flight and on arrival. You may want to consider bringing some ready to eat prunes to help you out.

- Don't think about the time zone back home, get straight into normal daily habits
- If exhausted on arrival - short naps of 30 - 45 mins do not induce grogginess and will allow recovery of mental performance
- Utilise a low dose of caffeine if required, by consumption of a cup of coffee, to help minimise drowsiness. Avoid caffeinated products approximately 5 hours prior to bed, particularly if you are caffeine sensitive
- Light exercise throughout the day, exposing yourself to sunlight at the appropriate times
- Eat small meals, that are high in fibre and polyphenols: berries, sweet potato, avocado, kiwi, whole grains
- Remember, loss of appetite can be common, but does not mean you do not require food
- Maintain fluid intake – where possible, use non-caffeinated products
- Go to bed at 'normal' times
- Use eye masks and ear plugs to help with sleep. Ensure room temp is right for you, not too cold and not too hot

### **Light exposure and circadian rhythms:**

Try to plan flights and schedules to help facilitate an optimum adaptation to the new environment.

Westbound travel:

- Seek light exposure and light exercise in early evening and first part of the night
- If you wake in the night, don't turn on the lights or expose yourself to sunlight until it is appropriate. Remain rested in the dark.

Eastbound travel:

- Seek light exposure and light exercise in early morning

## **Diet**

Specific nutrients may not influence circadian rhythms, but getting into normal eating routines (meal times and food quantity) can help assist with the realignment of the body's internal clock. Make sure you choose high quality, nutrient dense meals and snacks, avoid reaching for quick energy fixes from sweets and sugary drinks, and try to keep heavily processed and/or fried foods to a minimum.

## **Nutrient timings**

Energy intakes should be greater at the beginning of the day to support energy throughout rehearsals and performances. Skipping meals and eating large meals at the end of the day may lead to fatigue and weight gain.

Example food plan:

### **8am** Low GI breakfast e.g.:

1. Porridge with cinnamon, honey and berries and a cup of green tea
  2. Scrambled eggs and salmon on granary bread and a cup of white tea with pomegranate
- Sip on water and/or an electrolyte drink throughout the morning

### **12pm** Lunch: make this a more substantial meal e.g.:

1. Chicken arrabiatta pasta with a side salad, plus some fruit and a savoury seed mix
2. Prawn/tofu and veg stir fry with noodles/rice, plus a yoghurt and some mixed nuts

### **1-3pm** Rehearsals: During sip on an electrolyte drink e.g. SIS or FGS Hydro tabs

### **3pm** Light recovery snack e.g.

1. Low fat fruit yoghurt with some low fat granola and some fresh fruit and savoury seed mix
2. Sports recovery bar/shake and some fruit

### **4-5pm** General run

### **5pm** Turkey/falafel salad and avocado wholemeal wrap/seeded pita

### **7pm** Show: During sip on an electrolyte drink e.g. SIS or FGS Hydro tabs, or water

### **10-10.30pm** Post-show recovery – Recovery shake/bar or large glass of low fat milk and fruit

### **11pm** Snack if required – minestrone soup or chilli chickpea and lentil soup, or a sports pot

## **Nutrition and the immune system:**

When travelling to new environments the body is exposed to unfamiliar foods, bacteria and viruses, which increase the risk of illness. Long haul travel, intense training and the psychological stress of intense performance schedules can suppress immune function and increase susceptibility to infection. Prevention is key, so do everything you can to minimise your risk of illness and sustain optimal physical and mental performance.

## **Have you...?**

1. Checked that you are up-to-date with your immunisations?
2. Got enough of any medication that you are taking, to last for two weeks beyond the trip?
3. Purchased enough of the supplements you use to last the duration of the trip?

## Items to consider packing:

1. First defence spray
2. Anti-viral hand foam – e.g. Boots or Vicks
3. Ear plugs, eye mask and travel pillow
4. Sufficient supplements (e.g. hydration drinks, recovery shakes, omega 3s, probiotics)
5. Clean drinks bottle

## Traveller's diarrhoea

Traveller's diarrhoea commonly occurs through the consumption of bacteria in water or food sources, resulting in diarrhoea and vomiting. Other gastro related illness can also occur through the cross contamination of bacteria often found on surfaces, which are transferred by hand to mouth contact. The following tips will be useful for you to pay attention to, regardless of the country you are travelling to:

- Minimise your risk of infections by paying attention to personal hygiene:
  - Always wash your hands after training and before eating
  - Do not share drinks bottles or utensils
  - Make use of anti viral hand foams before eating
- Drink from sealed, bottled water. Also use this water to brush your teeth.
- In high risk countries, do not allow ice to be added to your drink, only eat fruit that you can peel, avoid salads that have been washed in tap water, and only eat cooked vegetables
- Make sure that any food that is meant to be served hot, is hot, and any food that is meant to be served cold, is cold
- Avoid street food

Report any symptoms of illness as soon as possible to the team physio or doctor. In addition to any prescribed medication, oral rehydration fluids will be necessary, and during the initial stages, a low fibre diet, free from caffeine and spices will be preferable. High lactose foods e.g. milk, should be introduced slowly.



Callum Findlay-White by One Dance UK, Dani Bower

## **Eating well on a budget**

Food quality is hugely important for a dancers performance and over health for many reasons including energy production, muscular recovery, bone health and the immune system, amongst other factors. Eating well whilst on tour can become expensive when you rely on local amenities, eating out, and service station food. Whilst this can not be completely avoided, you can cut your costs by:

- Planning and preparing. If travelling abroad, check what foods can be transported into the country and try to buy many of these foods in advance e.g. tinned fish, nuts, seeds, dried fruits, recovery drinks
- Try your best to buy individual meal components and prepare lunches and dinners, to not only avoid the cost of eating out, but to control what goes into your food, to avoid the regular consumption of high calorie low nutrient foods.
- Make use of local markets for fresh produce and indoor markets for nuts and dried fruit
- Order in bulk for greater discounts
- Order supplements through well respected companies when they have a sale
- Pack out meals with beans, lentils and quinoa, for high nutrient, protein rich carbohydrates that are very cheap to buy

