

Keeping Cool -- Managing Business Trip Stress.

-- By [Frank Gillingham, MD](#)

A trip to Miami for a week on South Beach can be a terrific vacation. A trip to Miami to meet customers or prospective partners can be utter misery. Business trips are by their nature very important and business travelers often feel that their quarterly sales number, annual review, and even bonus are on the line. Add the inevitable flight delays, the clueless or dangerous taxi driver, and the annoying chores like collecting expense account receipts and it's pretty clear why business travel can be so stressful and unpleasant.

The most common symptoms of stress that business travelers report are fatigue, aching limbs, loss of sense of humor, paranoia, memory loss, hyperactivity and weeping. Obviously the success of your meeting depends on you managing these symptoms!

Remember that fear of flying is extremely common and for some travelers accounts for much of the stress of business travel.

[The Fear of Flying Clinic](#) reports that one in eight Americans deliberately avoids commercial air travel due to this fear. There are many others who simply hold onto the airplane armrests so tight their knuckles turn white. While some degree of fear is perfectly natural, if it impacts on routine trips or if you find yourself driving long distances or avoiding travel altogether, consider discussing it with your doctor or seeking out other resources. The FOFC is a good place to start.

Feelings of stress that are severe or persistent, or that interfere with your everyday life, may constitute a medical anxiety disorder that should be evaluated professionally. Consider discussing your situation with an internist, family physician or general practitioner--a referral to a clinical psychologist or other therapist may be warranted. Anxiety disorders are extremely common and fortunately, there are excellent medications and non-pharmacological treatments available.

Here are some specific tips for managing stress on business trips:

- **Sleep.** Fatigue is both a major cause of stress on business trips and a major symptom. Go out of your way to sleep a little more than usual. Try to leave evenings free so you can get settled at your hotel room early. Daytime flying and exposure to bright sunlight can help you adjust to time changes (more on Jet Lag in a later article).
- **Where you stay is important.** Even if you're a hardened road warrior, there's nothing like a dirty hotel room in a bad part of town to increase stress. You might have to be clever to negotiate a room rate that meets your corporate travel budget but it's worth it to stay in a decent place.
- **Plan your flight.** Of course first class is the best place to relax but most of us don't have that luxury. Instead ask for an Exit Row Aisle seat, where there's more leg room. Dress comfortably--plan to put your tie on at your destination, or check into your hotel first and change clothes. Carrying your bags will lessen the chance of losing them but can be a real hassle in today's long airport corridors. Remember that there is a lot about air travel that you just can't control or change--accept those things and move on!
- **Watch your diet.** Something about being away from home makes even the abstemious order prime rib au jus and double chocolate mousse cake for dessert. Don't. Alcoholic beverages interfere with sleep and should be avoided or used sparingly. Remember the old expression--one's enough, two's too many and three's not nearly enough. So stick with none or one.
- **Exercise.** If you exercise at home, try to keep up your routine on the road, at a reduced level of intensity. Many Airport Hotels will allow you use of their health club for a small fee--perhaps only \$10 a day. If you don't exercise at home, a business trip is not the time to begin marathon training, but a moderate walk may relax you, aid your night's sleep, and allow you to see some sights.
- **Slow down.** Leave more time than you think you're going to need to accomplish your trip's goals. Schedule fewer meetings, an extra day, or a follow up trip the following month (better yet, have your meeting partner travel to your office). Some business travelers make a point of seeing at least one tourist destination during each trip.
- **Bring Reading material.** Don't just bring printed emails and business plans. Bring something you'll find interesting no matter how worn out you are: Sports Illustrated, Better Homes & Gardens, the latest John Grisham, whatever.
- **Help someone else.** This is the brilliant idea of Bill Heavey, a writer whose work has appeared on www.accenthealth.com, National Geographic Traveler, and other well-known publications. Instead of racing down the airplane aisle only to wait in line at baggage claim, help someone whose bag is stuck. "You'll be amazed how therapeutic such acts of kindness are," Heavey writes, and I have to agree. Maybe someone will even return the favor someday.
- **Consider Stress Regulation Techniques.** These techniques work on the road too. They include progressive muscle relaxation (see "The Relaxation Response," H. Benson, New York, William Morrow, 1975), biofeedback, self-hypnosis, and meditation techniques (including Zen, yoga, and Transcendental Meditation). Massage is

increasingly common and popular. The Concierge may be able to help you find a qualified therapist. The Internet has lots of information on all these relaxation methods.

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