

Coping with travel stress before you leave

• *Address the concerns of people close to you.* Especially if you are going somewhere they have never been, or somewhere dangerous, they will probably worry. You can help by giving them your travel itinerary, telling them how and when they can contact you, and whom to contact in your organization if they are concerned about you. You can discuss the issue of security with them and reassure them that you, and the organization you are working for, will do everything possible to ensure your safety. Listen to their concerns, and try to reassure them with specific, positive information.

• *Establish family contingency and emergency plans.* This may mean writing a will, leaving clear instructions on how to deal with a medical emergency and/or your death, and identifying trusted people who are available to help your family in the event of a worst-case scenario while you are away (such as all the children getting sick at once).

• *Pre-pay your bills.* You may want to suspend mail/newspapers/e-mail lists if you will be away for an extended period, or somewhere with limited e-mail access.

• *Anticipate important obligations* (like birthdays) that will occur while you are away or shortly after you return, and pre-prepare.

• *Make sure there's something in the house for you to eat when you return.*

Stock up on soup and pasta, or pre-cook meals and freeze them. This is especially important if you live alone.

• *Leave your house and your workspace clean and organized.*

• *Do what you can to have "normal" waiting for you when you get back.* This will mean different things for different people, but one thing to be wary of is packing your schedule full of appointments, meetings, and gatherings during the first few days after you get back (even if this is normal). Remind yourself that you will probably be tired, and deliberately build in a little extra breathing room.

• *Plan for some time off when you get back, and schedule it before you leave.* If before you even leave you plan for a short break after you get back, you are more likely to take time to rest than if you wait until you return and then see if you can squeeze it in.

• *Pre-schedule a welcome home "party" or gathering* so that you have something to look forward to.

• *Pre-pack certain items.* Staying "packed" to a certain extent can take some of the hassle out of packing. One thing that many people find helpful is keeping a cosmetics case fully stocked with toiletries.

• *Pack with a packing list.* Ironically, the more frequently you travel the more casual you may get about the process and, consequently, the more likely you are to make silly mistakes (such as missing flights and forgetting to pack important items). Packing with a packing list will take some of the mental effort out of packing and help prevent you from leaving important items behind.

- *Try to ignore unusual pre-departure behavior from those you love.* In the days before you leave, your family is starting to anticipate your being gone. During this time they may act and react differently than they normally would; for example, they may be withdrawing to try to protect themselves against the pain of saying goodbye. This can be hard, but try not to take it personally. Remember that they are also under some strain as they prepare to say goodbye to you.

- *Bid a temporary farewell to people close to you.* How you do this will depend on the departure rituals your family or friendship group has in place, but some ways of doing this are having a dinner, meeting friends for drinks, or leaving cards or little gifts for children under their pillows so that they will find them when they go to bed that night. Find a departure ritual that works for you.