

Coping with travel stress on the road

• ***Slow down.*** Leave plenty of time to make flights. Consciously move, talk, and behave, in a more relaxed manner while traveling. This will help you feel less tense and stressed.

• *Stay connected to family and friends back home.* Especially if you'll be away for an extended period, try to send out regular updates about your experiences. Tell a couple of stories that will keep people informed about some of the little details of your life, not just the broad brush-strokes of where you are and what you're doing. Send photos to help them visualize where you are. Ask someone at home to agree to be in regular, consistent, communication with you (perhaps weekly).

• *Stay connected to your home office.* Especially if you're traveling solo, communicate regularly with colleagues at headquarters. This will help you feel up to date on news and current projects when you return.

• *Try to keep up with some of the news.* For example, you might want to set your homepage to CNN or your local online newspaper. This will help you feel connected to the world outside your current posting.

• *Be organized in how you file receipts for expenses.* This will mean that filing your expense report will not be such a tedious chore when you return.

• *Don't neglect basic self-care.* Take time to eat right. Carry some bottled water and packaged food (e.g., muesli bars, nuts, dried fruit, and chocolate) with you. Find ways to exercise regularly. Look for opportunities to do things you enjoy.

• *Draw a line around the job, even on the road.* This can be very difficult, especially when you are working in crisis situations, disaster zones, and refugee camps. Try to ensure that you take at least two hours a day away from work. On deployments longer than 10 days, take at least one day off each week, and take your rest and relaxation leave. Taking adequate time off to rest and decompress is necessary to help ensure that you don't arrive home completely exhausted. In the long run this will help prevent burnout.

• *Remind yourself that you're functioning in a new environment and facing more challenges than usual.* Don't be surprised if you find yourself unusually tired. This is probably the result of doing your normal work, as well as the "work" associated with coping effectively with all sorts of changes that range from eating different food to cross-cultural communication challenges. Try not to expect quite the same level of productivity and efficiency from yourself as you would at home.

• *Seek out ritual and "normality."* Travel tends to remove us from rituals and routines that usually guide how we live and how we interact with others. People who travel frequently are more likely to be in environments low on ritual, surrounded by mental and physical chaos. Look for ways to establish some new rituals in areas that you find meaningful. For example, develop "on the road" rituals around nurturing yourself spiritually or unwinding at night.

• *Carry some "sacred objects" and good books with you.* Sacred objects are things that remind you of what you value most in life (e.g., photographs of your family, or objects that have spiritual significance for you). These serve as reminders that this trip is just part of the bigger story of your life. Books are always helpful to have on hand for times when you temporarily need to focus on something other than work. Make sure that at least some of these books are uplifting, humorous, and/or light. Humanitarian workers can see a lot of suffering, trauma, and violence during their day's work. It's wise to be careful of how much of

these things you ingest via entertainment."

- *Look for ways to build something enjoyable into your travel schedule on at least some of your trips.* For example, if you're visiting another city for a conference, build in some time to visit a local attraction. If you find you never have time while traveling for something educational or enjoyable, start being more proactive about making time.

- *Look for ways to capture what you're learning from each particular trip.* Find ways to capture what you are experiencing and what you are thinking and feeling. Some common ways to do this are through journaling, writing letters, drawing or collecting art, writing poetry or fiction, photography, and collecting stories and/or recipes from the places you visit.

- *Prepare for times when you find yourself feeling really "down" on the road.* Dealing with tough times on the road can be made easier by thinking beforehand about what may help. It's hard to think of things that will make you feel better when you're already feeling bad. You might want to carry a list of suggestions that you can refer to during these times. One thing that might be on that list is calling family or friends. Another activity is making a list of all the positive things you can identify about your current situation. Temporarily ignore the negative—you've probably been focusing on that enough for a while anyway—and challenge yourself to phrase things in positive terms. Get creative.

- *If you have a choice regarding your schedule, be intentional about the day of the week you return.* Many people prefer to return from trips on Thursday or Friday, to allow them a couple of days to rest and spend time with friends and family.