Fit Travel

Packing to survive your next trip

By Andy Core, MS

PUTTING TOGETHER A successful event is one thing. Surviving it is another. No doubt, life in this industry is stressful and often consuming.

5 a.m.
Your wake-up call announces: It’s show time! You grab some java and scramble down to the exhibit hall for a few finishing touches.

8 a.m.
Last-minute changes have grown into a serious list, and already you feel like you have put out more fires than Smokey the Bear.

11 a.m.
The hall doors open. Trying to remember when your headache started, you wolf down a cheese Danish and more coffee.

3 p.m.
During a two-minute hiatus, a petrified hotdog acts as your missed lunch, and your headache has a new friend, an aching back.

7 p.m.
The doors close on another day. As the adrenaline wears off, you feel as if you were dragged behind a stagecoach all day.

10 p.m.
Dinner ends and your third cocktail arrives.

11 p.m.
Exhausted, you fall into bed, too tired to sleep. Your mind races. The clock ticks.

If standing all day constituted exercise, most meeting professionals could run marathons.

One such meeting professional, whom I will call Ima Tired, logs more than 100,000 miles annually. Fifteen years of coordinating events left her overweight, out of shape, and feeling powerless to do anything about it. Finally, on a simple property tour, Ima grew so breathless and fatigued that she was forced to stop as her group forged ahead. This was the moment of truth for Ima. She knew she had to change her ways.

Now, 14 months later and more than 105 pounds lighter, “Ima Energized” is speed-walking through properties with a “catch me if you can” attitude. With a body that she cannot believe is hers, Ima is living life in the fun lane. Her journey to health and fitness began by changing her mindset. She admitted that a quick fix, like a fat-dissolving pill or an Ab Dazzler, was neither quick nor a fix. Her solution could only be found by looking within. She wanted a permanent change, and it all started with learning how to pack her suitcase. The following are five things you can pack to “lighten your load” too.

WALKING SHOES

If standing all day constituted exercise, most meeting professionals could run marathons. Being on your feet is as exhausting as running, but it will do nothing to eliminate your love handles. That requires 30 minutes of physical activity four to six times a week. The good news is three 10-minute mini-walks are just as effective as being chained to a treadmill for a continuous 30 minutes.

Ima finds it easy to slip on her walking shoes and walk 10 minutes to her first meeting, where she retrieves her heels from her event bag when she needs
them. Her second 10 minutes comes with a bonus. She grabs her event bag that holds her small can of tuna, crackers, and an apple and then walks 5 minutes to get away from the crowd. To finish her 30 minutes, Ima walks the long way back to her room after dinner, feeling the stress of the day fade away with each step. Now, packing her walking shoes is a reminder to walk her way to a better body.

**BYOF: BRING YOUR OWN FOOD**

Eating while traveling typically means that you have coffee for breakfast, a moderate lunch, and a huge, heavy dinner. This eating strategy has been proven by scientific research to be the most efficient way to out-blubber a sperm whale. People who eat this way often cite extremely low energy levels, even when eating large quantities of food.

Most people will tell you that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. While breakfast may be the most important meal for children, for busy adults the most important meal of the day may be a healthy 3 p.m. snack. If you eat nothing during the six hours between lunch and dinner, your blood sugar will drop to the basement, which causes low energy, mood swings, poor productivity, and a rhino-sized appetite.

For Ima, the solution was to pack a snack in her event bag and set the alarm on her watch for 3 p.m. By eating an afternoon snack, she could control her appetite and maintain her energy level. There are many healthy, packable foods available such as dried or fresh fruit, energy bars, low-fat granola, tuna, baby carrots, pretzels, high-fiber dry cereal, whole grain bagel, instant soup, and packages of instant oatmeal. Small containers of orange juice are another must-pack because high-stress jobs demand more Vitamin C.

While eating healthy implies staying away from the Cinnabon counter, the impulse that led you there is real. A Cinnabon binge impulse is the body’s signal that your gas tank is empty. If you let your gas tank run completely dry, your body’s natural impulse is to crave the most calorically dense foods: chips, candy, cookies, nachos, pizza, burgers, etc. The bottom line: if you BYOF, you will beat the afternoon lull, increase your willpower, and not gain fat.

**WATER BOTTLE**

Surveys of hundreds of business travelers from several different corporations found the average business traveler drinks less than one glass of water a day while traveling. Dehydration is another common cause of afternoon fatigue and a rampant appetite. Even slight dehydration reduces mental and physical energy by up to 25 percent. Drinking enough water can be the difference between crashing at 3 p.m., or finishing the day strong. Water is capable of significantly boosting energy and decreasing appetite. So having water by your side is a must for traveling professionals, and consuming water between each meal is the key to healthy hydration and quick thinking.

**BACKGROUND NOISEMAKER**

What happens to a child’s mood when he or she misses a nap? What happens to a meeting professional’s attitude when he or she has not gotten enough sleep? Quality sleep is critical to being happy, healthy, and productive, but it can be hard to come by in a busy hotel. One of the best ways to promote sleep is to change the mind’s focus away from intrusive noise. Background noise, like the sounds of electric fans, a crackling fireplace, rain, and even the purring of a cat, can provide relief. Packing a small machine that will produce similar sounds will assure you the rest you need to be at your best.

**HEADPHONES**

When the stress that comes with coordinating people and events hits, the idea to stop and rest deliberately wouldn’t cross your mind. Yet, just 5 minutes of quiet, focusing on slowing your body and mind, can send you back to the front energized. By packing a pair of headphones and some relaxing music, you always have access to an instant mini-vacation.

Listening to relaxing music will refocus your mind and enable you to regain your mental and emotional well-being. A great way to enhance this feeling of relaxation is by incorporating deep, diaphragmatic breathing. There is a mountain of research to support deep breathing as one of the best stress-management tools. An easy way to implement deep breathing is with a 4-1-4-1 breathing pattern. This pattern consists of a deep 4-second inhale, 1-second pause, 4-second exhale and a final 1-second pause before you repeat the cycle.

**PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER**

When Ima gets a break in her day, she slips on her walking shoes, walks just 5 minutes away, where she can sit, eat, and enjoy a few precious minutes of peace. Listening to her headphones, sipping from her orange juice and water bottles, Ima finds herself feeling back in control of her stress, her body, and her life.

The irony of Ima’s success is that the travel schedule that once caused her weight gain now provides motivation to lead a healthy lifestyle at home as well. All it took was learning how to pack her suitcase.

Andy Core is a professional speaker who helps busy people beat stress and live life with maximum energy and health. © 2009, Andy Core, MS. All rights reserved. Used with permission.