

FIT TO FLY?

Paul Cheung reveals some simple ways to keep the bulge at bay



Travelling for business has its perks – seeing new places and meeting new people keeps life interesting. But if you're a frequent flyer, it's likely you're all too familiar with the ongoing battle either to get fit or stay fit. If you aren't quite so health-conscious, you may at least experience the odd pang of guilt after indulging in yet another heavy meal or seeing fellow professionals returning from a stint in the hotel gym.

Whichever camp you fall into – the fitness freak, the well-intentioned or the downright lazy – spending much of the year getting on and off planes, checking in and out of hotels, passing through multiple time zones and adopting haphazard eating patterns is a serious hurdle to achieving your goals and developing a routine that can be sustained.

As we are all aware, the issue of fitness has become a nationwide problem – in 2010 the British Heart Foundation reported that nearly one in four adults were obese. And it seems the risk for business travellers is particularly acute. According to a study in the *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine* in April, those who travelled most frequently not only had higher obesity levels but also reported feeling more unhealthy.

Research in 2008 by Dr Richard Godfrey, a senior lecturer at the University of Brunel, suggested that fitness levels could be maintained for about two weeks without significant decreases, but in practice many travellers find they start to diminish far quicker. "After one week, I find that changes are very visible," says David Foo, a financial operations analyst who travels between the UK and Singapore. "I definitely see increased fat around my abdominal area."

It's easy to see why – from the moment you set foot on a plane, you're thrust into uncontrollable territory. But there are simple ways to make yourself feel healthier and maintain your fitness levels, and they start with the flight itself.

In 2007, a study by the American College of Sports Medicine showed that dehydration – a particular risk on board – "significantly compromised the ability to perform resistance exercise". It's therefore vital to keep yourself topped up. "Try carrying a bottle with you at all times and refill it as needed on the plane," advises Mark Kennedy, a kinesiologist (a specialist in the science of human

movement) and one of the founders of healthynomics.com, which provides tips on maintaining a healthy lifestyle.

Equally important is to keep moving. British Military Fitness instructor Alex J Abdullah suggests some simple exercises to try on board: "While you're up, try this head-to-toe sequence – find a space towards the back of the plane, and start to rotate your neck in one direction and then the other. Rotate your shoulders backwards and forwards, twist at the waist left and then right, rotate your wrists, clench and unclench your fingers and finally rotate your ankles clockwise and anti-clockwise."



The key to keeping on track is making small, targeted goals

"Without bouncing, reach down and try to touch your toes to stretch your hamstrings, which will be tight from being in a prolonged sitting position. Finish with gentle controlled squats. This sequence will keep circulation moving and you'll feel much less lethargic." (For a less public workout, see overleaf for exercises you can do in the privacy of your hotel room.)

Another problem people have to contend with in the air is a lack of good-quality food. Even on a major airline such

as Virgin Atlantic, a typical transatlantic economy flight will get you one hot meal, a choc-ice for a mid-flight snack and an egg or cheese croissant before you land. The saturated fat content of the choc-ice and croissant combined tops 40g, more than half of the recommended total daily fat intake of 70g (based on a 2,000-calorie diet). So do you eat products laden with sugar, salt and fat, or go hungry and risk going into a catabolic state (when your body starts breaking tissue down)?

While you may think that skipping the odd meal won't do you any harm – and may even help you to lose a few pounds – starving yourself in this way will actually hinder your achieving this. When you are in a catabolic state, your cortisol levels rise, preventing fat loss and promoting muscle wasting. So eating a small amount, of preferably nutritious cuisine, is better than nothing at all. Consider requesting a "special" meal when you book your flight, such as one with low sodium, fat or calories – most long-haul carriers offer this option.

What about when you reach your destination? Amy Mac, fitness entrepreneur and creator of the Hotel Workout series (withamymac.com), says the key to keeping on track is "making small, targeted goals". "It can be as simple as having a healthy breakfast, eating lean meats and vegetables for lunch and dinner, only one high-calorie/sugar treat a day and fitting in 20 minutes of exercise a day for the duration of your trip," she says. "Don't set yourself up for failure by saying: 'I will work out in the morning before my meeting and eat salad for lunch everyday and absolutely no desserts.'"

Before bedtime, get yourself into a restful state. Elite-level coach Will Woodfall, who runs London personal training studio Fit 4 Purpose, recommends his "post-flight process". "Before stretching, have a warm bath to relax your body and raise your temperature," he says. "Concentrate on stretching your quads [front thigh muscles], hamstrings and calves for about 30 seconds each. This will encourage down-regulation of the sympathetic nervous system and increase blood flow and energy around the body. Do all this in a dark room. This will get your body ready for a deep sleep by releasing the hormone melatonin."

The next day, try to balance the time you eat with the time you exercise. It's easy to get confused about what your pre-training nutrition should be but, simply speaking, you need to ingest carbohydrates, which will fuel your workout. According to Alex

Popple, a performance nutritionist for British Swimming, it all depends on how much time you have to digest prior to training. "Two to four hours before, you can have a medium to large serving of carbohydrates such as pasta or rice. One to two hours before, a small to medium serving of carbohydrates such as toast, cereal or a banana, and less than one hour, have a high-carb drink such as milk or non-acidic fruit juice."

If you find there is no pool or that the hotel's gym consists of a knackered stepper and a few unpaired dumbbells, don't despair. Kennedy says: "Last year I travelled to India in the hot season so running outdoors was out of the question. I had to be creative and exercise in my room. It's amazing how a quality workout can be performed just by using your bodyweight – push-ups, lunges, squats, stairs, jumps, you have many choices." If the climate is conducive to jogging, ask at reception for a map of nearby routes.

Abdullah adds: "If the hotel gym is adequate but you're short of time, try compressing your usual workout into a circuit. The key is to get in and out in 30-40 minutes. If you want to concentrate on weights, do a circuit that incorporates exercises that hit each major body part – your chest, your back, your legs, your arms and your shoulders – do one set each with no rest in between."

If you want to focus on cardio, you could use interval training. "It doesn't matter if it's the bike, treadmill or cross trainer," Abdullah says. "Work at maximum intensity for 30 seconds and then return to a comfortable pace for a minute. Alternate between the two extremes for no more than 20 minutes and I guarantee you'll have a good workout."

As a general rule, Will Woodfall recommends training in the morning so that you can "get it done and it isn't competing with other things". A big no-no is training right before you go to bed. "This will produce too much cortisol and adrenaline, which will turn your nervous

system on and make it more difficult to sleep," he says.

Depending on the space in your suitcase, Kennedy says one of his must-takes is the Basic TRX Suspension Training Pro Pack (from £132, trxfitness.co.uk). "It's a full-body workout tool [which involves using elasticated resistance straps] that can be used in your hotel room or outside in the park. I have attached my TRX to trees, hotel doors, swing sets and football crossbars. The anchoring options are numerous. It weighs less than 1kg and can easily fit into carry-on luggage." The Pro Pack comes with a basic training DVD including a 30-minute workout that hits your upper and lower body and core. Latex resistance bands (from £4, amazon.co.uk) are also lightweight, versatile and effective.

Sheraton is one hotel brand trying to help its guests to stay fit – its sheratonfitness.com/training microsite offers four 20- to 30-minute in-room workouts from Core Performance to download. Or if you have an iPhone, try the Fitness Builder app (£6.99), which contains 5,600 exercise images and videos and more than 750 workouts.

Technogym (technogym.com) has another solution. The Technogym Wellness Key plugs into the fitness company's machines and sets them to your preferred workout, so you can get going straight away. It also tracks your movements and measures the intensity of your exercise, which you can later plug into your computer to see how hard you've worked. A new model that can also be used for outdoor exercise, My Wellness Key, is scheduled to arrive in gyms next month.

Once you have completed your regime, finished your meetings, and are feeling pretty good, then comes the real test – an evening of schmoozing, boozing and unhealthy eating. But don't worry if you do occasionally falter. "I am all about moderation," Mac says. "If someone wants to take me to try the best burger and fries in the city, then great. It just means I might add five minutes to my jog and eat lighter meals the following day. You have to be flexible but focused when on the road." ■



The real test is an evening of schmoozing, boozing and unhealthy eating

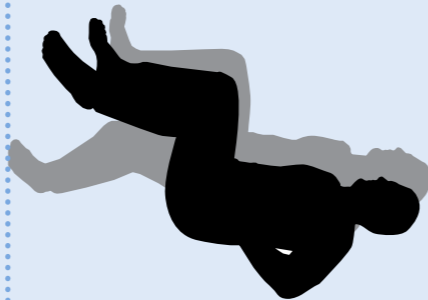
The hotel room workout

Elite-level trainer Will Woodfall from Fit 4 Purpose has put together a workout exclusively for *Business Traveller* readers that is suitable for men and women of varying levels of fitness. "You're working on the weak points that you wouldn't focus on in the gym such as shoulder stabilisers and hip flexibility – key components in avoiding injury," he says. "Do the exercises three to eight times as a circuit with little or no break in between." For more advice, email fit4purpose@live.co.uk



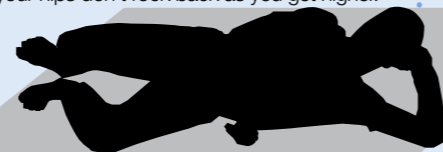
Warm-up

1 Leg slide – five repetitions per leg (one set).
What does it work? Core.
Lie on your back and lift both legs off the ground so your knees are bent and directly above your hips. Draw your belly button gently into your spine, squeezing pelvic floor muscles. Take one leg and straighten it slowly towards the floor so that the heel is an inch from the ground. Bring it back to the starting position.

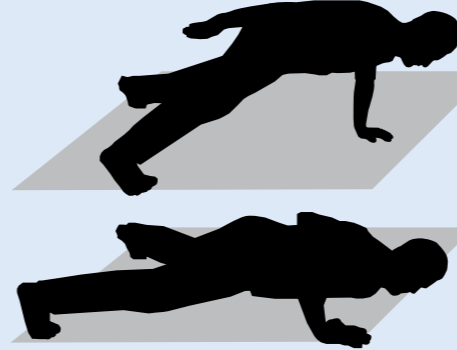


2 Clam – ten for each leg (one set).
What does it work? Glutes (rear muscles), hips, core.

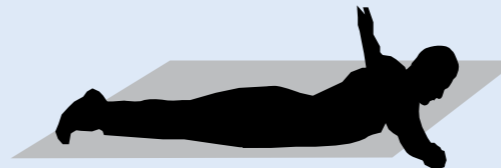
Lie in a foetal position with your knees bent at 90 degrees, heels touching each other. Open your knees with heels still together. Hold and squeeze your glutes for five seconds. You may only have a small range of motion but ensure your hips don't rock back as you get higher.



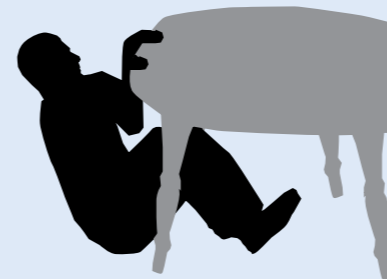
Workout



3 Press-up plank – six repetitions per arm.
Press ups – six repetitions (four sets in total).
What does it work? Chest, core, shoulder stabilisers, serratus (muscles in side of chest). Start in a press-up position with your feet wide apart, hands directly beneath your shoulders. Your spine should be neutral, not curved or rounded. Slowly lift one arm off the floor and touch your hip without anything moving. After doing each arm six times, finish with six press-ups, making sure that when you come up, you push your hands into the ground and spread your shoulder blades apart as if you're sliding them off your back.



4 Prone T-Raise – 12 repetitions (one set).
What does it work? Neck, upper back.
Lie down face first with your forehead on the floor. Get into a "T" position. Squeeze your shoulder blades together and lift your arms off the ground for five seconds. Don't let your arms glide down into an "arrow" shape.



5 Desk row – ten repetitions (one set).
What does it work? Upper back, biceps, lats (lower back muscles).
Lie with your legs underneath a desk, hold on to the edge and bend your knees. Row yourself up (gripping on to the table edge) so that your chest touches the desk. Tempo is – up for one

second, hold for four seconds, down slowly for four seconds.

6 Chair lateral step-up – 12 repetitions for each leg (one set).
What does it work? Adductors (thigh muscles), glutes, hamstrings, quads. Grab a chair, preferably cushioned (this will make it more unstable and work the stabilising muscles in your feet and ankles). Stand side on to the chair and step up on to it with the closest leg (be careful not to put your weight too near to the edge, as it might fall over). Lift the toes of the straight leg up to minimise its assistance.



7 Lunge matrix – 24 repetitions (one set).
What does it work? Hamstrings, quads, glutes, adductors, hips.
Lunge forward until your back knee is an inch from the ground. Switch leg. Lunge out to the side (point toe in direction that knee is going) so that the trailing leg is straight. Switch leg. Lunge backwards on one leg and then the other. Each lunge counts as one repetition.



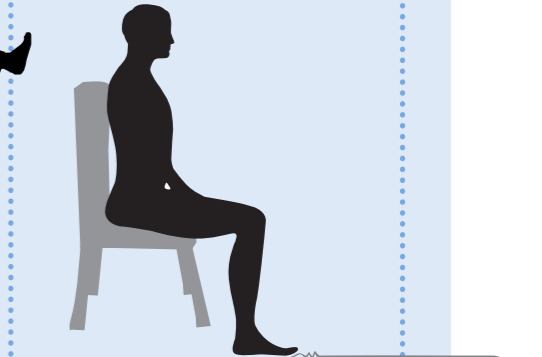
8 Deck squats – 12 repetitions (one set).
What does it work? Whole body.
Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart. Descend into a deep squat position and round

your back. Gently fall on to your backside and roll on to a rounded back (like a turtle shell). Then roll forwards, fling your arms towards your hips and roll on to your feet, before standing up straight. Jump at the top if you can.



Cool-down

9 Towel scrunches
What does it work? Feet, ankles.
Sit on a chair with a towel under your bare feet. Stretch the towel out lengthways in front of you and place one foot on it, the other next to it on the floor. Using only your toes, scrunch the towel in with one foot, slowly, before switching feet. There should be no movement in the knees or ankles.



10 Single-leg balance on mattress – one repetition.
What does it work? Feet, knees, hips.
Do a one-legged balance on your bed for one minute per leg. You should feel your hips and feet burning because of the instability of the mattress. To make it more challenging, close your eyes.

