

After the epic club set ends and you're packing up your flight case — with USB sticks tucked safely inside — a deceptively simple question creeps up: *should I wear sunglasses on the ride back?* It might sound like a minor detail, but if you're a touring DJ or a weekend warrior balancing shifting schedules and time zones, that short post-set ride can be a pivotal moment for your **circadian rhythm** and overall recovery.

In this post, I'll break down the science of light cues, shift work research, and practical touring wisdom to help you decide the best post-set routine — whether that includes sunglasses or something else entirely. This isn't just about looking cool; it's about hacking your body clock to stay sharp and sane on the road.

## The Science of Circadian Rhythms and Light Exposure

Your circadian rhythm, often called your body clock, is the internal timing system that regulates your sleep-wake cycle, hormone release, body temperature, and other vital functions. One of the most powerful environmental signals for your circadian rhythm is light — especially blue-enriched morning sunlight.

### Why Morning Light Matters

Morning light exposure helps to:

- Reset your internal clock daily
- Promote alertness and mood through cortisol release
- Trigger melatonin suppression to wake your body up

The flip side? Exposure to bright morning light too early after a night shift or late gig can abruptly flip your schedule, making it difficult to get quality daytime sleep and recover quickly.

### Light as a Circadian Phase Shifter

Circadian rhythms can be advanced or delayed based on light timing:



- Exposure to bright light in the morning tends to **advance** your rhythm (making you sleepy earlier the next day).

- Bright light at night delays the rhythm (pushing your sleepiness later).

This means the moment between finishing your club set—usually in the early morning—and sunrise is a critical window for circadian manipulation.

## Shift Work Research Applied to DJs

Much of what we know about circadian light cues comes from shift work studies — night shifts, rotating shifts, and long-haul travel — contexts that closely mirror DJ touring schedules. Scientific consensus from these studies shows:

1. **Blocking morning light with sunglasses** immediately after night work can help maintain your shifted schedule.
2. Exposure to bright light during your "biological night" leads to increased alertness but can delay sleep onset.
3. Consistency and timing are more important than duration for light exposure effects.

For DJs, this means the classic “morning after a gig” period requires deliberate light management to avoid jarring your circadian clock into an unwanted day-shift mode.



### Practical DJ Context

Imagine you finish your set at 5 AM, pack your USB sticks back in the flight case, and hit the ride home. The sun is starting to rise. If you don't block that morning light, your circadian rhythm might abruptly start shifting earlier. This can make you sleepy during daytime travel or complicated layovers, screwing up next gig prep.

## Schedule Flipping and Weekend Touring

Many DJs struggle with flipping schedules weekend to weekend: intense late-night gigs on Friday and Saturday, trying to recover Sunday and Monday, then prepping for a Monday/Tuesday show. This creates a highly unstable circadian environment.

### The Trouble with “Grinding” 24/7 Without Light Cues

Romanticizing all-nighters without acknowledgment of physiological toll leads to over-fatigue and chronic jet lag-like symptoms. Instead, applied shift work strategies recommend strategic light exposure control—like wearing sunglasses the ride home—to preserve a modified circadian rhythm [side-line.com](https://side-line.com) across tour legs.

- On consecutive nights, blocking morning light helps maintain a consistent "night shift" state.
- Between gigs across multiple cities/time zones, intentional light management reduces "social jet lag."
- Improved schedule stability leads to higher energy and focus on stage, less reliance on stimulants.

## Time Zones and Routing Tradeoffs

Tour routing can force tough tradeoffs for circadian management. For example, back-to-back gigs in cities a few time zones apart or multiple flights after late-night shows.

Scenario Circadian Challenge Light Management Strategy Late show in NYC, flight to LAX next morning Big time zone difference, risk of rhythm confusion Wear sunglasses on the morning cab ride; expose yourself to bright LA afternoon light to shift rhythm Weekend festival at altitude (bright early mornings) Unwanted early wakeups Use blackout curtains and sunglasses; avoid early light; keep consistent sleep schedule Multiple short hops on overnight flights post-gig Intersecting rhythms with jet lag and fatigue Prioritize blocking morning light during cab or shuttle rides if sleep is planned immediately after

## Practical Tips for Your Post-Set Routine

Integrating sunglasses into your post-set routine is more than a style choice; it's a **circadian rhythm hack**. Here are practical tips based on both science and backstage experience:

1. **Have a dedicated set of wrap sunglasses:** Keep an inexpensive, comfortable pair in your flight case alongside your USB sticks and cables, ready for the post-club ride out.
2. **Wear sunglasses immediately after loading up your gear:** Don't wait until sunrise; the transition period is critical.
3. **Use blackout curtains in your hotel room:** Don't underestimate blackout curtains' effectiveness for controlling light cues before your planned sleep—keep a running list of which hotels fail at this critical feature.
4. **Try a short 1-2 hour 'nap' before dawn if feasible:** Even a brief rest can aid recovery.
5. **Plan your airport and transit time with light exposure in mind:** Avoid early morning terminal windows with huge skylights; wear sunglasses if delayed outdoors.
6. **Supplement light exposure intentionally:** On arrival in a new city during daylight hours, get outside without sunglasses to reset your rhythm toward that locale's schedule.

## What Not to Do

There are some common but counterproductive habits that I see as a former club night manager and touring assistant:

- **Don't rely solely on caffeine or supplements to maintain alertness:** They don't fix circadian misalignment and often worsen fatigue.
- **Don't assume an unstable all-nighter schedule is sustainable:** Your rhythm needs stable cues or purposeful management.
- **Don't neglect the quality of your post-set sleep environment:** That hotel blackout curtain failure you keep noting? Fix it with eye masks or room-darkening setups.

## Wrapping Up: The Case for Sunglasses on the Ride Home

So, should you wear sunglasses on the ride back from the club? If you're serious about managing your energy, wake times, and optimizing your **post-set routine**, the answer is yes. This simple addition to your travel rig—right alongside those trusty USB sticks in your flight case—can help preserve your circadian rhythm, block morning light, and smooth the transition between gigs, time zones, and sleep cycles.

By thinking about light exposure with the same seriousness as your gear loadout, you can hack your biology rather than succumb to the unpredictable grind. And honestly, that's a shift work lesson every DJ on tour can appreciate at 6 AM.