

# Staying Healthy at High Altitude

When you are at a high altitude, your body will notice a difference. Here are a few helpful hints to help you stay healthy during your visit.

- ⇒ **DRINK PLENTY OF FLUIDS**
- ⇒ **TAKE IT EASY THE FIRST DAY**
- ⇒ **WEAR SUNSCREEN AND A HAT**
- ⇒ **AVOID ALCOHOL\* OR SLEEPING MEDICATION**
- ⇒ **USE CAUTION WHEN DOING STRENUOUS ACTIVITIES**

*\* The effects of having one drink can be like having two drinks at sea level*

## **MOUNTAIN WEATHER**

Mountains are notorious for unpredictable and rapidly changing weather. The best way to be prepared is to dress in layers that can be added or removed incrementally as the weather changes. A waterproof outer layer is crucial as well as waterproof gloves. For insulating layers, cotton is not recommended because it becomes cold and heavy as it absorbs water and sweat. Remember to shed layers when hot to prevent sweating because later you will likely be cold and damp from the sweat. An extra pair of dry socks and/or gloves can be helpful.

## **INTENSE SUN**

For every 1,000 feet above sea level, you are exposed to about 5% more UV. During winter, snow reflects UV very effectively, multiplying exposure. Springtime can be a particularly dangerous time for sunburn because a lot of people have had minimal contact with the sun over the long, darker days of winter, their skin is not quite ready for the dramatic exposure to full sun. Applying and reapplying sunscreen is crucial, even on a cloudy day. Consider lip balm with sunscreen in it as well. Sunglasses or goggles with UV protection are essential.

## **ACUTE MOUNTAIN SICKNESS**

Altitude sickness is caused by gaining elevation more quickly than your body can adjust to the thin air at high elevations. The result is that your body is robbed of oxygen. Slow ascent to altitude is the key to acclimatizing well.

The most common form of altitude illness is a group of symptoms known as Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS). These symptoms include:

- |                     |                    |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| Headache            | Nausea or vomiting |
| Sleep Disturbance   | Dizziness          |
| Shortness of breath | Fatigue            |

The following normal physiological changes occur at altitude:

- ⇒ Hyperventilation (breathing heavily)
- ⇒ Shortness of breath during exertion
- ⇒ Increased urination
- ⇒ Changed breathing patterns during the night
- ⇒ Awakening frequently during the night
- ⇒ Weird dreams

Acute Mountain Sickness has been reported to occur in 17% to 24% of those who travel from sea level to above 8,000 feet. The illness usually begins within four (4) hours of arrival in 60% of those affected. On occasion, the onset of symptoms may be delayed for two to three days. AMS is generally a self-limited condition spontaneously resolving within three to four days.

High Altitude Cerebral Oedema (HACE) - this is when the brain is affected by the lack of oxygen and it swells at altitude. It can occur when initial symptoms of AMS are ignored, however it can develop with no other symptoms or follow-on from AMS.

Seek medical attention if you develop these symptoms or if you have nausea, headaches, or fatigue that continues for more than a few days.

**Stay healthy and enjoy the mountains!**



Born out of our love for the outdoors and the desire to promote an active lifestyle.

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