



FROM
YOUR DOCTOR

How to stay well at high altitude

Are you going skiing, mountain climbing, trekking, or just visiting at an altitude over 6,000 feet? You need to know about acute mountain sickness. It affects 1 of every 4 people who moves from low to high altitudes. The higher you go, the greater your chances of getting sick.

Acute mountain sickness can lead to more serious, even life-threatening conditions—a waterlogging of the lungs or brain. The good news is that you may be able to avoid getting sick. And if you do get sick, quick action can make you well again.

How can I avoid getting sick?

- Learn as much as you can before going to 8,000 feet or higher. Ask your doctor for information on altitude sickness.
- Listen to your body. It's normal to have a few symptoms, like a headache, for the first couple of days when you go from low to high altitude. But if the symptoms get worse or change by the third or fourth day, get help.
- If you can, stop at a medium altitude for a few days on the way up. Your body needs time to adjust to less oxygen. A rule of thumb is to take one day to climb each 1,000 feet above 8,000 feet.
- If you can't take time to do this, take the drug acetazolamide (Diamox). It helps prevent acute mountain sickness for most people. Ask your doctor about this and other medications to prevent or treat the illness.
- If you're sick, postpone your trip. Even a mild cold or flu-like illness may increase your risk of a serious altitude illness. If you must travel before you're well, talk to your doctor.
- If you have a heart or lung problem or are worried about the effect of altitude on an existing illness, consult your doctor.

Should I change my diet?

- When you reach your destination, take it easy for the first couple of days. It's better to eat frequent, small meals than a few large ones. Don't drink a lot of alcohol.
- Drink lots of extra water. This will help replace moisture lost in sweating and in breathing dry, cold air. Water also helps you adjust. You should pass more urine than usual, and it should be "as clear as gin."

- There is no special diet that will help you get used to high altitudes. Vitamins and minerals don't help either.

How active can I be?

- It makes sense not to work your body too hard for a few days after arrival. Take it easy and enjoy the view!
- If your heart beats much faster, if you are much more short of breath while exercising at high altitudes, or if you feel worse after two days, talk to a doctor.
- If you are moderately active at sea level, you can be moderately active at 8,000 feet.

If I'm sick, what should I do?

- Descending about 2,000 feet will make you feel better quickly. If you still don't get better, tell a doctor right away. You may have another illness.
- Taking extra oxygen relieves symptoms. If you use it at night, it will help you sleep well.
- Medications can relieve altitude sickness but should be taken only with instructions from a doctor.

What warning signs should I watch for?

Most people tolerate 8,000-9,000 feet with only minor symptoms. But get help quickly if

- ▶ Your symptoms get worse rather than better
- ▶ You develop a hacking cough
- ▶ You have trouble walking
- ▶ You feel confused
- ▶ Your friends think you're hallucinating.

Continued

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continued

The information you provide here will be helpful to physicians who may take care of you if you become sick while traveling. Carry it with you in a safe place.

Your medical passport

If you're older than 40 or have heart disease, place a recent EKG (heart rhythm) strip here. Your doctor can give you one.

My EKG of _____
Month / Day / Year

Do you have

- Heart disease? If Yes, please list: _____
- Lung disease? If Yes, please list: _____
- Any other chronic diseases? If Yes, please list: _____

Do you have an upper respiratory infection (cough, cold) right now? Yes No

Medications you take REGULARLY			Medications you take SOMETIMES		
Drug	Strength	Amount taken each day	Drug	Strength	Amount taken each day
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

List each drug, the strength of each pill (for example, 250 mg), and the amount you take each day.

Where do you live? At sea level *or* At _____ feet altitude

Please list the name and address of your regular physician: _____

How can your doctor be reached in case of emergency?
Phone: () _____