

Mountain and Altitude Hazards



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مركز الأمراض الإنتقالية
Communicable Disease Center

عضو في مؤسسة حمد الطبية
A Member of Hamad Medical Corporation



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Introduction

As altitude increases, the amount of oxygen decreases. At 2500 meters, the air holds 26 percent less oxygen than at sea level on the other hand our oxygen requirements remain the same.

The Illness

There is huge individual variation but it is most likely to occur on journeys above 2800 meters (9000 feet), particularly if there is no time for acclimatization.

Risk and severity increases with higher altitude. Illness may develop suddenly or be delayed up to 48 hours, by which time the traveler may be at even greater altitude.

In mild forms of altitude sickness climbers will experience reduced exercise tolerance and increased breathless on exertion, disturbance of sleep pattern (insomnia) and some individual's may notice swelling of the hands, feet, and face.

Treatment

The most important treatment for those who are unwell is to descend, if you get worse or you are unwell descend immediately to lower altitude. Continue to descend until your symptoms resolve. A descent of as little as 300 meters (1000 feet) may be lifesaving.

Can we prevent altitude sickness?

Yes. All reasonably fit individuals can climb to high altitude provided they take care.

Some drugs may be used to prevent Altitude Sickness such as Acetazolamide (Diamox) that can be started one to two days before ascending.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRAVELLERS

If you travel in-group:

1. Leaders of groups have a particular responsibility to make sure that the group pace is not set by the most competitive climber.
2. Before climbing to heights above 3000 meters, stay for one or two days at that altitude or below.
3. A safe policy is to restrict each day's climb above 3000 meters to 300 meters.
4. Allow one full rest day every two or three days or for every increase of 1000 meters.
5. Avoid alcohol.
6. Avoid excess exertion for the first couple of days,
7. Reduce salt intake.
8. Increase the proportion of carbohydrates in your diet.