

## Altitude Sickness

- The higher the place, the less oxygen there is in the air. When the human body is exposed to high altitudes it needs to **acclimatize** (adjust) to lower levels of oxygen. If the body doesn't have enough time to acclimatize, altitude sickness can occur. Men, women, and children are at equal risk, though the risk is slightly lower after age 50.
- Travellers heading to destinations higher than 2,000 metres (about 6,600 feet) may be at risk for altitude sickness.
- High altitudes may be classified as:
  - › Moderate: 2,000-3,500 m (6,600–11,500 ft)
  - › Very high: 3,500-5,500 m (11,500–18,000 ft)
  - › Extremely high: more than 5,500 m (18,000 ft)

### How to avoid altitude sickness

- Talk to your family doctor if you have chronic lung or heart conditions or other health conditions, as these may put you at higher risk for altitude sickness.
- Talk to your family doctor about using acetazolamide to prevent altitude sickness, or if you have had altitude sickness in the past.
- Drink lots of water.
- Eat foods high in carbohydrates and low in salt to keep up your energy.
- Avoid alcohol and sedatives.

*Types of altitude sickness, symptoms, treatment, and special warnings are listed on the back of this information sheet.*

## Types of altitude sickness:

1. Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS): This is the mildest and most common form. People with AMS can safely stay at their current altitude and take time to treat their symptoms.
  - › Symptoms: Headache (main symptom), tiredness, loss of appetite, feeling sick to your stomach, vomiting.
  - › Treatment: Acetazolamide, which speeds up acclimatization.
  - › **Warning: DO NOT go any higher** if you have symptoms of AMS. **A small percentage of people with AMS may get HACE (see #2) if they go to a higher altitude.**
2. High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE): This is an extension of AMS.
  - › Symptoms: Same as AMS, plus **gait ataxia (difficulty standing up)**, confusion or altered mental state.
  - › Treatment: Any person who might have HACE should be taken to a lower altitude.
  - › **Warning: If not recognized and treated early, HACE will lead to coma and death.**
3. High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE): HAPE occurs 2-4 days after arriving at high altitude, often getting worse at night. HAPE can range in severity from mild to immediately life threatening.
  - › Symptoms: The person will not be able to be as active as normal and may have a dry cough. **Shortness of breath while at rest** is the main symptom.
  - › Treatment: Go to a lower altitude as soon as possible.
  - › **Warning: HAPE can cause death within a few hours** and is the most common cause of death from high altitude.

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