

What is altitude illness?

Most people experience mild headache, some shortness of breath and a need to pass more urine for the first few days after arriving at high altitude, as the body adjusts to lower oxygen levels in the air.

Mountain sickness is an illness, where headache occurs together with any of the following symptoms:

- poor appetite, nausea, vomiting
- dizziness, weakness, tiredness.

Emergencies that can occur at high altitude include:

- high-altitude cerebral oedema (HACE), which causes symptoms of mountain sickness plus confusion or poor co-ordination
- high-altitude pulmonary oedema (HAPE), which causes severe breathing problems.

Altitude illnesses can happen to anyone, even people who have been to high altitude before without problems.

Altitude illnesses are treatable but if ignored, they can become an emergency—don't wait, tell someone if you feel unwell.

Following the rule 'GO SLOW, SLEEP LOW' is the best prevention for altitude illnesses

Discuss your ascent plan with professionals who have expedition expertise.

If you have **NO** history of altitude illness on previous trips:

Plan to ascend to an altitude of no more than 2800 metres in 1 day, or take at least 2 days to go from sea level to heights up to 3000 metres.

If going further:

- ascend no more than 500 metres per day AND
- stop for an extra night after each 1000 metres of further ascent AND
- if possible, sleep at an altitude that is lower than the highest point reached in the day.

If you **DO** have a history of altitude illness on previous trips:

Seek advice from a health professional with expedition expertise to assess the risks of the trip you are considering.

Other advice before you go to high places

Discuss your trip with a medical professional—this includes:

- any symptoms you have had at high altitude before
- whether you should take preventive medication for altitude sickness
- common symptoms or illnesses (eg cough, diarrhoea) you might experience
- preparation for extremes of heat or cold you might encounter
- how to safely transport and store medicines
- first aid kit or other equipment you may need
- considering medical insurance.

Make sure you know the emergency rescue contact numbers in each region.

If climbing, climb with a buddy and ensure that you tell others the details of your climbing plans.