

# Mountain Sickness

## Definition

- Symptoms that occur with travel to a high altitude
- Starts at 8,000 feet (2400 meters) above sea level or higher
- Also called Altitude Sickness

## Health Information

### **SYMPTOMS of MountainSickness Include:**

- Throbbing headache is the main symptom
- Fatigue, dizziness, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting are other common symptoms
- Shortness of breath on exertion
- Restless sleep or trouble falling or staying asleep
- In infants the main symptoms are being more fussy and less playful. Other symptoms are decreased feeding, vomiting and poor sleep.
- Symptoms usually begin within 6 to 12 hours of getting to the higher elevation.

### **Altitude Levels**

- Moderate Altitude - 8,000 to 12,000 feet (2,400 to 3,600 meters): Most ski resorts are at this level. Jets are pressurized equal to being at an altitude of 7,000-8,000 feet (2,100 - 2,400 meters).
- High Altitude - 12,000 to 18,000 feet (3,600 to 5,400 meters) The highest place that humans live is at 16,000 feet. (4,800 meters)
- Extreme Altitude - 18,000 to 29,000 feet (5,400 to 8,700 meters). Mount Everest is 29,028 feet high.

### **First Aid for Severe Symptoms**

- Severe symptoms can occur to someone who makes a sudden climb to over 10,000 feet. Symptoms include shortness of breath and coughing. They can also include confusion and trouble walking.
- Quickly take them to a lower altitude. Go down at least 2000 feet. Always go below 10,000 feet.
- Get them oxygen as soon as you can.

## Care Advice

### **1. Overview:**

- Mild Mountain Sickness symptoms include headache, dizziness, nausea, vomiting, and poor sleep. Shortness of breath only with exertion may also be present.
- Most often symptoms begin within 6 to 12 hours of getting to higher altitude.
- These symptoms will get better with rest.

### **2. Cause of Mountain Sickness:**

- Acute Mountain Sickness is caused by the lower amount of oxygen in the air at higher altitudes.
- Symptoms occur in 20% of normal people who go quickly from sea level to 8,000 feet.
- They occur in 50% of normal people who go to 10,000 feet or higher.

3. **General Treatment for Mountain Sickness Symptoms:**
  - Fluids. Drink twice the normal amount of fluids. Reason: Mountain air is dry and causes increased water loss.
  - Rest. Take it easy. Postpone skiing, hiking, or any other activities until you feel better. Then start slowly back into full activities.
  - Postpone going higher until you feel better. Going to a lower altitude (down 2000 ft or 600 m) will make you feel much better faster.
4. **Headache Treatment:**
  - For pain relief, give acetaminophen every 4 hours or ibuprofen every 6 hours as needed. (See Dosage table). Ibuprofen may be better.
  - The headache and dizziness may be improved by breathing faster and deeper to bring in more oxygen. Do this for 5 minutes and see if it helps.
5. **What to Expect:**
  - The human body needs time to adjust to altitude.
  - Symptoms most often will go away after 1-3 days if you do not go higher.
6. **Prevent Mountain Sickness:**
  - Try to stage your mountain visit. Spend a few days at 5000 to 7000 feet (1500 to 2100 meters) before going to the high country.
  - Take it easy on the day of arrival. Some exercise (like short walks) is helpful, but take rest breaks. Slowly increase the amount of exertion during the second and third days.
  - Do not go more than 1000 feet (300 m) higher per day during the first days.
  - Drink lots of fluids. Stay well hydrated.

## Call Your Doctor If

- Severe headache lasts over 2 hours after taking pain medicine
- Headache lasts over 3 days
- Trouble breathing or coughing occurs
- Your child becomes worse
- You think your child needs to be seen

### Pediatric Care Advice

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