

Altitude Illnesses

9000m

**Death
Zone**

7500m

**Extreme
Altitude**

5500m

**Very High
Altitude**

3500m

**High
Altitude**

1500m

Altitude starts to have an effect on the human body at around 1500 - 2000m. The body starts to behave differently as it tries to make up for lower oxygen levels.

Go up too fast to above 2400m and altitude illnesses are common. Given enough time to adapt, most people can adjust to altitudes between 5000m (Everest base camp) and 5500m. Above 5500m few people can adjust any more.

The common possible problems varies greatly, but the following is a generalised idea of what can occur:

- ◆ High Altitude Cerebral Oedema (HACO)
- ◆ High Altitude Pulmonary Oedema (HAPO)
- ◆ A heart condition can worsen due to thickening of the blood
- ◆ High levels of UV radiation at altitude can easily cause sunburn and burn the eyes.
- ◆ Changes in the inner ear trigger the symptoms of dizziness and light-headedness commonly found in AMS.
- ◆ A blocked nose upsets the normal warming and humidifying process that is essential to keep the lungs healthy.
- ◆ There may be an increased risk of blood clots in the legs (DVT) when taking the combined contraceptive pill at altitude. This risk is low in a fit, active, non smoking lady unless staying above 4,500m for over a week.
- ◆ A child's organs are being formed in the first three months in the womb so it is best to avoid high altitude during this time.
- ◆ Children have the same problems as adults, but it is more difficult to tell when they are having these problems.
- ◆ Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS)
- ◆ Your mouth and throat will get dry when you breathe through your mouth. Drink lots and use cough lozenges.
- ◆ Poor hygiene can trigger wisdom teeth problems.
- ◆ The cold air at altitude will upset un-treated broken fillings and cavities.
- ◆ Low temperatures and low oxygen make it easier for your skin to develop frostbite, especially in people who already have poor circulation.
- ◆ Change in food and hygiene habits can give you diarrhoea.
- ◆ Kidneys will produce more urine causing dehydration.
- ◆ Increased joint pain due to unusual activity.
- ◆ Disturbed sleep at altitude is common and normal. In some people this may cause 'periodic breathing' at night, where rapid breathing is followed by periods when breathing briefly stops, sometimes causing you to wake up.
- ◆ Retinal Hemorrhages can occur.



Info from MEDEX - Travel at High Altitude Booklet

The Golden Rules

Learn the early signs & symptoms of altitude illnesses and recognise them in yourself and others.

Never ascend to sleep at a higher altitude with symptoms of AMS.

Descend if your symptoms are getting worse whilst resting at the same altitude.

If you are not sure of the illness or how to treat it, ALWAYS DESCEND Loose at least 500 meters.

- RED is life threatening
- BLUE means CAUTION is advised.
- GREEN means you can probably carry on with the trip unless symptoms get worse.

