High Altitude Sickness

Serious medical problems can develop when you have a rapid exposure to high altitudes. Usually this is 8,000 feet or higher. Going quickly from lower elevations to high ones gives your body less oxygen. This causes a flu-like illness.

Problems that may happen are:

- Headache.
- Nausea and or vomiting.
- Dizziness.
- Shortness of breath.
- Marked fatigue.

People in good physical condition also can get "mountain sickness". About one quarter to one half of people will get high altitude symptoms at 7,000-15,000 feet. Rarely the brain or lungs swell enough to cause life threatening symptoms.

Most of the time high altitude sickness improves shortly after going down below 8,000 feet. A tank of oxygen helps. Staying at altitude for 2-3 days also works. Prevention is the best measure. This is done by ascending slowly. Go to 6,000-8,000 feet over several days. Sleep at lower altitudes. Avoid salt, alcohol and sleep medicines. They reduce oxygen levels. Medications are available to help prevent mountain sickness. If you know you are going to high altitudes, your caregiver can help you. You do not have to worry about most plane travel. Planes are pressurized.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF YOU HAVE:

- Increased shortness of breath.
- Chest pain, or a rapid pulse.
- A dry cough or one that produces bloody mucus.
- Severe headache.
- Mental confusion.
- Difficulty walking.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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