# Altitude Sickness

Mountain sickness occurs when a person goes to a high altitude (usually 8,500 feet or higher) without first letting the body adjust to the higher elevation. It can occur in anyone regardless of physical condition and generally develops over 24 to 96 hours. Mountain sickness can make a person seriously ill and should be treated as a life threatening condition and a medical emergency. Initial *symptoms* (problems) include shortness of breath, cough and exhaustion. Sometimes swelling of the brain (high altitude cerebral edema) can occur with this. Its symptoms are severe headache, confusion, uncoordinated movements, hallucinations, weakness. This can progress to stupor, coma, and death. The most effective treatment is oxygen, rapid evacuation to a lower altitude, and hospitalization. *THE BEST TREATMENT IS PREVENTION*!

## HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Exercise lightly for the first 24 to 36 hours.
- Drink plenty of fluids and eat small, light meals.
- Avoid smoking, sedatives and alcoholic beverages.
- To prevent high altitude sickness during future trips give your body a few days to adjust to the changes in altitude before starting activities. Go to higher elevations slowly giving your body time to adjust. Visit higher elevations during the daytime and return to lower elevations at night. Medications are available which can prevent this illness. If you have previously been diagnosed with high altitude sickness, it is best to be *prophylactically* (preventively) placed on one of these medications.
- If high altitude symptoms develop while climbing, it is best to descend to a lower altitude as rapidly as possible.

## SEEK MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You do not feel better in 4 hours or as your caregiver suggests.
- You have mountain sickness (headache, *nausea* (feeling sick to your stomach), vomiting, tiredness, shortness of breath, dizziness, and difficulty sleeping) and returning to a lower elevation dose not relieve the symptoms.

## SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF YOU DEVELOP:

- Severe shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Rapid heart beat
- Increasingly severe headache
- A dry cough that produces bloody sputum
- Difficulty walking
- Difficulty concentrating
- Confusion

## 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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