

# Traveling to High Altitudes

## High Altitudes and Low Oxygen

The low oxygen levels found at high altitudes can cause problems for travelers who are going to areas higher than 8,000 feet above sea level.

The best way to avoid getting sick is to ascend slowly over a few days. If that isn't possible, medicine can prevent altitude illness.

## Altitude Illness

The symptoms of altitude illness include:

- headache
- feeling tired
- lack of appetite
- nausea (upset stomach)
- vomiting (throwing up).

Mild cases should go away on their own within a few days. Serious cases (a person whose symptoms get worse while resting at the same altitude) can lead to serious illness or death if the person doesn't get out of the high altitude.

## What to Do and Not to Do

If you plan to travel to a higher altitude and sleep there, you can get sick if you don't ascend gradually.

- Do not go from a low altitude to sleeping at higher than 9,000 feet above sea level in one day. Instead, spend a few days at 8,000–9,000 feet before proceeding to a higher altitude to give your body time to adjust to the low oxygen levels.

- Once you are above 9,000 feet, increase your sleeping altitude by no more than 1,600 feet a day.
- Do not drink alcohol or do heavy exercise for at least the first 48 hours after you arrive at an altitude above 8,000 feet.
- As an alternative, consider taking a day trip to a higher altitude. It's less risky to take a day trip to a higher altitude and then return to a lower altitude to sleep.
- If your trip doesn't allow a gradual ascent, talk with your doctor about getting a medicine to prevent altitude illness. Talk with them about how well this medicine may or may not work.
- Know the symptoms of altitude illness so you can take steps to prevent it from becoming more severe. Many high-altitude destinations are remote and lack access to medical care, so preventing altitude illness is better than getting sick and needing emergency treatment.
- If you have heart or lung disease or diabetes, talk with your doctor before you travel to high altitudes.
- If you are pregnant, talk with your doctor before you travel.

**Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.**