

Altitude/Mountain Sickness Treatment

Mild altitude sickness or acute mountain sickness:

Symptoms may include:

- Fatigue
- Headache
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Sleep problems
- Swelling of arms and legs
- Vomiting
- Weakness

Severe altitude sickness, high-altitude pulmonary edema (HAPE) or high-altitude cerebral edema (HACE):

Symptoms may also include:

- Shortness of breath at rest, fast heart beat, dry cough, pink frothy phlegm or sputum, or crackling sound in lungs (HAPE)
- Severe headache, altered vision, disorientation, hallucinations, seizures, and coma (HACE)

1. Descend to Lower Altitude

- For mild acute mountain sickness, the person may be able to stay at current altitude to see if his or her body adjusts. If symptoms don't get better in 24 to 48 hours or if they get worse, the person should go down to a lower altitude and seek immediate medical care.
- For severe symptoms, the person should immediately be taken down 1,500 to 2,000 feet with as little exertion as possible. Keep going down until symptoms go away. Get medical help right away as waiting could cause serious problems or even death.
- Even if symptoms are mild, the person should not go any higher in altitude until symptoms are completely gone.

2. Treat Symptoms

- Give oxygen, if available.

- Keep the person warm and have him or her rest.
- Give plenty of liquids.
- Give acetaminophen (Tylenol) or ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) for headache .
- Avoid alcohol and sleeping medications.

3. See a Health Care Provider

- If mild symptoms persist after descent, call a health care provider.
- For severe symptoms, the person should see a doctor as soon as possible, even if symptoms go away after descent.