

Altitude Sickness

As anyone who has ventured thousands of feet above sea level can attest, altitude sickness can be a real and uncomfortable (sometimes dangerous) condition. The higher you go, the thinner the air. Get too high too fast, and your body doesn't get the oxygen it needs. Most people can reach 8,000 feet without experiencing altitude sickness. But the ailment can strike as "low" as 5,000 feet above sea level.

Common altitude sickness symptoms can strike anyone—regardless of their fitness level. They include:

- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea/vomiting
- Fatigue/loss of energy
- Insomnia

Here are some tips to avoid altitude sickness while you are here in Taos:

1. Hydrate

This is the best way to help your body adjust to high altitude. Generally the low humidity at altitude keeps the air dry, so you should drink twice as much water as you would at home. Also keep in mind that you want to *add* water to your body, not deplete it. At least initially, avoid caffeine and alcohol.

2. Replenish

Foods rich in potassium are great for acclimating. Some good staples to eat include broccoli, bananas, avocado, cantaloupe, celery, greens, bran, chocolate, granola, dates, dried fruit, potatoes and tomatoes.

Do your body a favor and decrease salt intake.

Additionally, complex carbohydrates are great for stabilizing your blood sugar and maintaining energy. Eat plenty of whole grains, pasta, fruits, and vegetables.

3. Easy does it

Adjusting to higher altitude can take a few days. Plan calmer activities the first 24-48 hours of your trip. You *will* feel the effects of exercise more at altitude than at home. By all means, get after it. But dial back the effort if you're short of breath, sore, or consistently fatigued.

4. Shade yourself

The big sky country of the mountains isn't a figment of your imagination. There's less water vapor in the air here, which makes the color of the sky bluer than the sky at home. It also means there's 25 percent less protection from the sun. If you don't lather up with sunscreen—a proper amount to apply is a shot glass worth each time—you burn. This is true regardless of your complexion.

5. Doctor's orders

Take Ibuprofen to relieve altitude-induced headaches. Ginger chews, capsules or tea to settle the stomach can help if you start feel the symptoms.

6. Seek help

Whether your symptoms are consistently mildly uncomfortable or they're acute, altitude sickness is real and can be debilitating. If attempts to alleviate them don't work, head to the nearest medical clinic. They are staffed by knowledgeable medical professionals who understand the impacts of altitude on the body and will help.

Enjoy your stay in Taos and your experience at OSU's Doel Reed Center for the Arts.