AMS - Don’t die of altitude sickness!

Bruno, here are the important information for you! Do not get killed by AMS. That’s a terrible disease. It comes unawares.

Every year, many people die of altitude sickness. All of these deaths are preventable. If you are travelling above 2500m (8000ft), read this information and tell your companions about it - it could save your life.

What is altitude sickness?

Altitude sickness has three forms. Mild altitude sickness is called acute mountain sickness (AMS) and is quite similar to a hangover - it causes headache, nausea, and fatigue. This is very common: some people are only slightly affected, others feel awful.

However, if you have AMS, you should take this as a warning sign that you are at risk of the serious forms of altitude sickness: HAPE and HACE. Both HAPE and HACE can be fatal within hours.

HAPE is excess fluid on the lungs, and causes breathlessness. It is never normal to feel breathless when you are resting - even on the summit of Everest. This should be taken as a sign that you have HAPE and may die soon. HAPE can also cause a fever (a high temperature) and coughing up frothy spit. HAPE and HACE often occur together.

HACE is fluid on the brain. It causes confusion, clumsiness, and stumbling. The first signs may be uncharacteristic behaviour such as laziness, excessive emotion or violence. Drowsiness and loss of consciousness occur shortly before death.

What causes altitude sickness?

Two things are certain to make altitude sickness very likely - ascending faster than 500m per day, and exercising vigourously. Physically fit individuals are not protected - even Olympic athletes get altitude sickness. Altitude sickness happens because there is less oxygen in the air that you breathe at high altitudes.

Altitude sickness prevention

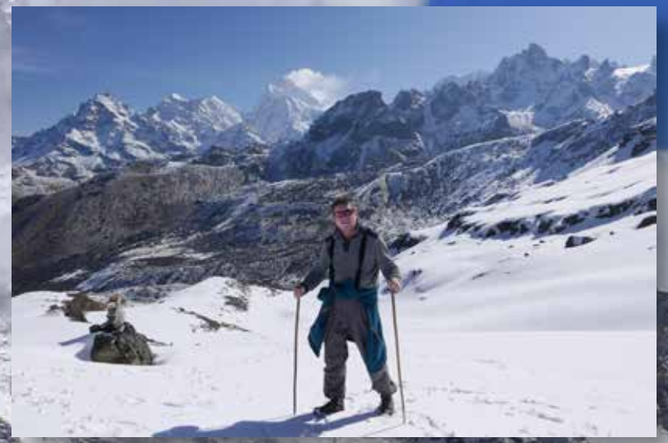
Go up slowly, take it easy, and give your body time to get used to the altitude. The body has an amazing ability to acclimatise to altitude, but it needs time. For instance, it takes about a week to adapt to an altitude of 5000 m.

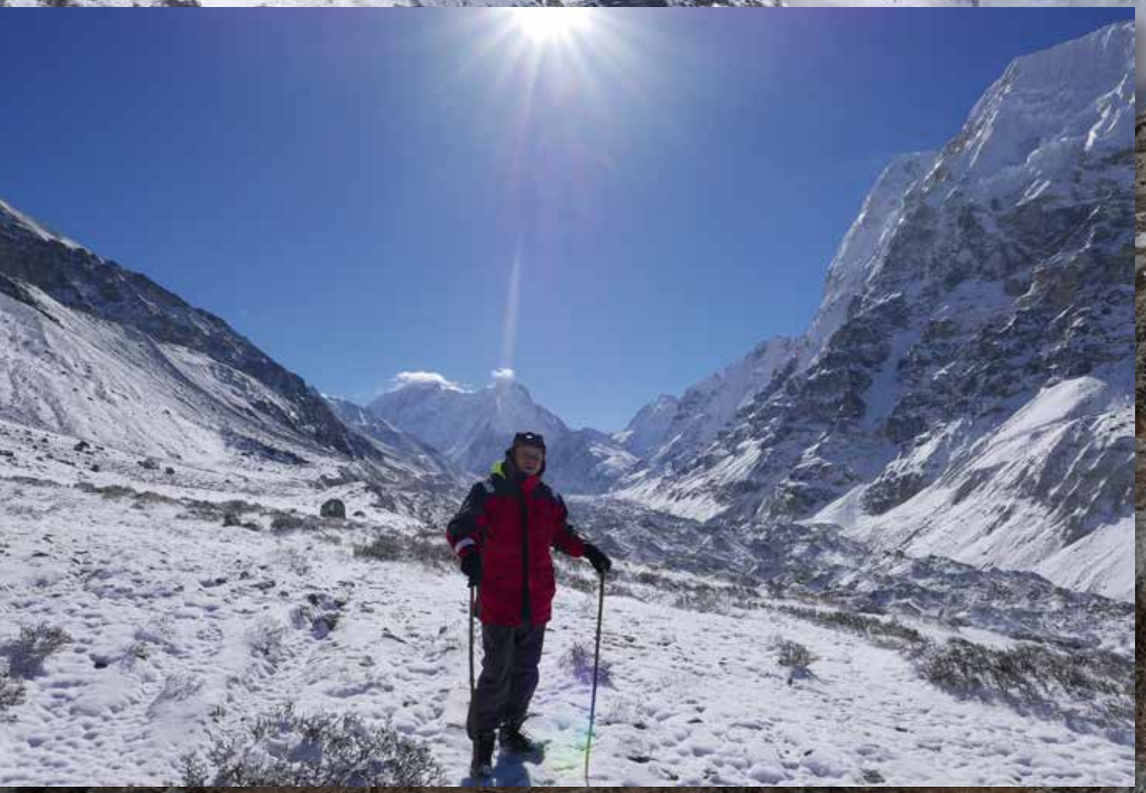
Where does acute mountain sickness happen?

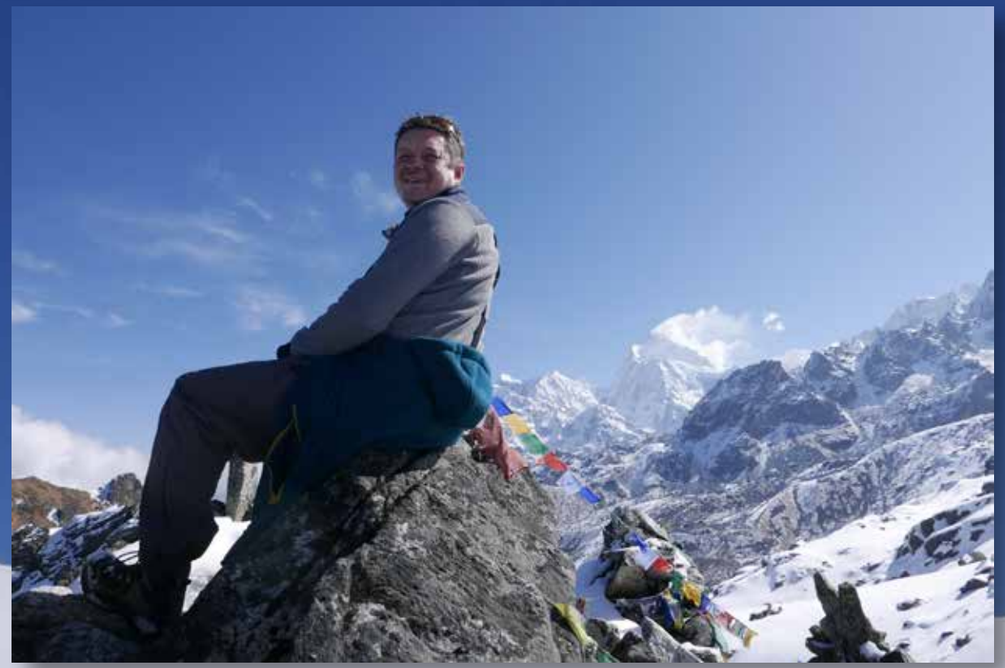
Most people remain well at altitudes of up to 2500m, the equivalent barometric pressure to which aeroplane cabins are pressurised. However, even at around 1500m above sea level you may notice more breathlessness than normal on exercise and night vision may be impaired. Above 2500m, the symptoms of altitude sickness become more noticeable.

How are the symptoms of altitude sickness measured?

The most prominent symptom is usually headache, and most people also experience nausea and even vomiting, lethargy, dizziness and poor sleep. Symptoms are very similar to a really bad hangover. If you have recently ascended to over 2500m, have a headache then you have with high propability acute mountain sickness.



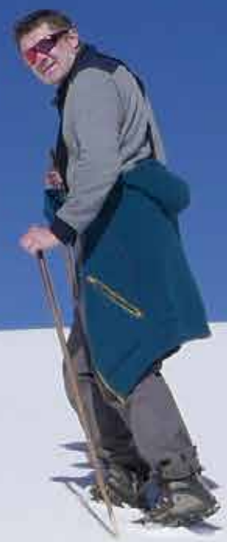




Who gets acute mountain sickness?

Anyone who travels to altitudes of over 2500m is at risk of acute mountain sickness. Normally it does't become noticeable until you have been at that altitude for a few hours. Part of the mystery of acute mountain sickness is that it is difficult to predict who will be affected. There are many stories of fit and healthy people being badly limited by symptoms of acute mountain sickness, while their older companions have felt fine.

There are a number of factors that are linked to a higher risk of developing the condition. The higher the altitude you reach and the faster your rate of ascent, the more likely you are to get acute mountain sickness. If you have a previous history of suffering from acute mountain sickness, then you are probably more likely to get it again. Older people tend to get less acute mountain sickness – but this could be because they have more common sense and ascend less quickly.



What causes altitude sickness?

There is so much less oxygen in the high mountains that it is not surprising that travelling to high altitude causes people to feel unwell, but how this shortage of oxygen actually leads to altitude sickness is still not fully understood. Some scientists believe that it is due to swelling of the brain but the evidence for this hypothesis is not conclusive. The theory is that in susceptible individuals, swelling could cause a small increase in the pressure inside the skull and lead to symptoms of acute mountain sickness. The swelling may be due to increased blood flow to the brain or leakiness of blood vessels in the brain.

What are the treatments for altitude sickness (mountain sickness)?

It is better to prevent acute mountain sickness than to try to treat it. Following the golden rules should mean that your body can acclimatise as you ascend and so you will be less likely to develop acute mountain sickness. However, if you need to go up more quickly, you could consider taking a special drugs.

As with any form of altitude sickness, if you do have acute mountain sickness, the best treatment is descent. Painkillers may ease the headache, but they don't treat the condition. It is essential that you should NEVER go up higher if you have acute mountain sickness.

Source: www.altitude.org