

## **What is Altitude Illness?**

- Altitude Illness, also known as Acute Mountain Sickness, is caused by un-acclimatized persons traveling up to altitude. Acute Mountain Sickness ranges from mild headache and nausea, to significant vomiting and life threatening illness

Possible symptoms:

- Mild: Nausea, vomiting, headache
- Moderate: Unable to keep liquids down due to significant vomiting
- Severe: Severe headache, confusion, difficulty breathing when at rest or walking short distances

## **Risk of Altitude Illness**

- **You are at low risk of severe altitude illness if you are traveling to less than 2,800m (9100ft).** The town of Estes Park is located at 7,523ft elevation. Risk of any form Altitude Illness generally begins above 8,000ft elevation and risk of severe illness increases as the elevation increases. Rocky Mountain National Park ranges from 7,800ft- over 14,00ft at its highest peaks.

## **Prevention**

1) Slow ascent

- If time allows arrive in Denver and stay a few days around 5,000ft of elevation prior to traveling to Estes Park, which is 8,000-9,000ft

2) Relax, but not too much

- Upon your arrival to higher altitude avoid strenuous activity, drinking alcohol and taking sedative-hypnotics including benzodiazepines for at least the first 24 to 48 hours.

3) Drink water and eat Carbohydrates.

- While the data on eating a carbohydrate rich diet at altitude is inconclusive, there is some thought that it may reduce the risk of severe altitude illness. Staying well hydrated can prevent nausea and headaches. Especially if you are not accustomed to such a dry climate make sure to drink plenty of water. The easiest way to monitor your hydration is to drink water sufficient to make your urine clear. Obviously, be cautious with fluid intake if you have significant medical history of congestive heart failure or kidney failure.

4) Acetazolamide (also known as Diamox)

- This is a diuretic, which has been shown to reduce symptoms of Acute Mountain Sickness by 75%. Because this is a diuretic if you choose to take this prophylactic medication make sure to drink more water. This medication can make your urine clear even if you are still dehydrated. Make sure to discuss this medication, the benefits and risk with your doctor.

## **Seek Help**

- If you experience severe headache, confusion, difficulty breathing at rest or when walking short distances or for any other concerns seek medical attention. Estes Park Emergency Department is very familiar with Acute Mountain Sickness.