



Hiking in High Altitudes

Living in Arkansas you don't have to worry too much about having problems with high altitude with our state's highest elevation being 2,753' at Mt. Magazine. But if you decide to participate in one of our club's hiking trips, say up in the mountains of Glacier National Park, Rocky Mountain National Park or some other high mountain range, or planning a hiking adventure on your own, you need to be aware of how altitude can affect you as a hiker. When hiking above 8,000' you run the risk of suffering from altitude sickness, which is definitely no fun! Hiking above this level may take your body time to acclimatize with there being less oxygen, lower humidity and a bigger exposure to ultraviolet rays up high. Acclimate gradually. Each hiker has a different tolerance and may acclimate at different rates. Take the time to be prepared knowing what the symptoms of altitude sickness are and what steps you can take to try and avoid or minimize having a problem in high altitudes.

Most common signs or symptoms of altitude sickness:

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Nausea
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty sleeping (a good trick is to prop your head up to breathe easier while sleeping)
- Extreme lethargy / fatigue

Severe symptoms may be rapid pulse, vomiting, loss of balance or coordination, dry cough or fever.

Steps to minimize your risk:

- Get plenty of rest
- Eat well balanced meals & drink plenty of water (you will need more food & water up high—your muscles will burn energy more quickly and your body will need more calories and water to function properly)
- Take aspirin or Ibuprofen during the first few days of hiking to help reduce symptoms of altitude sickness
- Avoid or cut back on alcohol and caffeine during the first few days as you acclimate as these both increase dehydration
- Ascend at a gradual pace. Don't push yourself and gradually reduce your pace as you gain elevation. This will keep your body from overexerting due to the reduction of oxygen. If you notice you are having more difficulty breathing, slow down your pace or stop and take a rest break.
- Include rest days during your trip in order to give your body time to adjust to the change



How to treat:

- For mild symptoms while hiking, take a break and rest and take in fluids and food giving hiker a chance for symptoms to recede as their body adjusts. If symptoms still persist or get advanced, do not go any higher -- stop hiking and descend down the mountain. Call for medical services, if necessary.
- Take aspirin or Ibuprofen for headaches
- Should you get altitude sickness, it can take up to a couple of days for symptoms to subside. Once they do it should be ok to start ascending again but do it slowly and set your pace according to how you are feeling.

Hydrate, hydrate and hydrate some more – your body needs more water when in high altitude and it is beneficial if you start drinking more water than usual days BEFORE you reach your hiking destination. While hiking, drink water even if you do not feel thirsty. You will notice that you may need to urinate more often and this is a natural reaction to the altitude. Remember that the air is much drier up high and moisture will be drawn out of you a lot quicker.

So, be prepared as you journey to higher altitudes. Best advice is to listen to your body and don't push yourself if you are feeling the effects of altitude. Acclimate gradually and pace yourself. And lastly – *don't forget your sunscreen!*