Altitude

A complex and as yet not fully understood set of physical and biochemical changes occurs as the human body is exposed to the decreased levels of oxygen available in the air breathed at high altitude. The general term used to describe these changes is acclimatisation. Generally Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) occurs when people travel to altitudes above 3500m. This information is given as a guideline only.

Ascending too fast for adequate acclimatisation to take place can result in a person experiencing symptoms of Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS). It is essential that anyone contemplating activity at altitude has a basic knowledge of the symptoms of AMS, what can be done to prevent them, and what must be done should they occur. Failures to recognise and address these simple criteria can have disastrous, even fatal, consequences.

You must also be psychologically prepared. There is no way of knowing beforehand who will be susceptible to AMS, or when a particular individual will experience it. Age, sex, physical fitness, will-power and pressing itineraries have absolutely no bearing on AMS, and you must be ready at all times to respond appropriately, should a problem develop. Challengers must not ignore symptoms for fear of disrupting the group.

Prevention

The best way of avoiding AMS is to acclimatize properly, avoid heavy or fatty foods, and make sure you drink plenty of water – dehydration makes AMS more likely. Diamox is a drug which some participants use to speed up acclimatisation. *Speak to your doctor before taking this medicine.*

Symptoms & Treatment

- Headaches
- Breathlessness
- Difficulty sleeping
- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Loss of appetite

(These symptoms usually develop during the first 36 hours at altitude)

If a Challenger shows signs of AMS, they will be taken to a lower altitude immediately. On many routes we are never far from a medical facility where oxygen bottles are stored. Our event doctor will be on hand to monitor the situation.