

## Outdoor Travel Tips

# Adventurer's Health Tips

It is a common phenomenon that there is a tendency to travel to more 'adventurous' areas once the more common destinations have been visited. Listed below are some of the health problems that an adventure traveller might face:

### / The Health Risks

#### Cold acclimatization

'Cold' denotes an immediate environment that is below body temperature. Shivering is the earliest sign of the body's response. Travellers have to rely on insulation via layers of body fat and trapped still air in clothing. Prevention of the effects of cold thus depends upon the maintenance of body heat by an adequate supply of energy (food and drink), blocking heat loss and preservation of insulation.

#### Snakebite

Avoidance of walking or hiking through the bush and the use of long pants, high stockings and boots are advised.

If bitten, rest and extreme immobilization with a splint or sling is needed. A broad tourniquet must be applied tightly 2-4 inches above the site of the bite to prevent the spread of the venom. The only specific remedy for snakebite is anti-venom.

#### Leeches

Rainforest trekkers should always be wary of leeches. Get yourself a pair of thick socks. Wear it normally and tie just below your knee, this will prevent the leech from getting in between your toes and feet. Apply salt onto your hands or any exposed area. If you see leeches crawling or sucking your blood already, you either wait for it to get full and drop off by itself or apply salt onto the leech and it will drop off instantaneously.

Tuck your shirt into your pants. This will prevent the leech from crawling to your belly, armpits and anywhere warm.

#### Hypothermia

Climbers in a mountain setting will rapidly lose body heat and develop hypothermia. Hypothermia is defined as generalized chilling of a person with a core temperature of 35¼ degrees C or less. Signs include feeling cold, lethargy, poor concentration and inability to keep up with others. Place the patient in a horizontal position with the head slightly down and protected from heat loss. Rapid re-warming in water at 42¼ degrees C with inhalation of heated, aerosolized air is the best. Evacuate immediately.

#### Other venomous insects

These include scorpions, spiders and centipedes. Travellers must avoid sleeping directly on sand and check their shoes before inserting their feet. Treatments for bites include local anesthetic for pain relief and anti-venom, if indicated.

#### Mountain travel

Acclimatization to high altitudes occurs at 2,500 - 3,000m above sea level with changes to bodily functions that occur in response to lowered oxygen content. They include increase in the oxygen carrying capacity of the blood and the ability of tissues to extract oxygen from the blood.

#### High altitude or mountain sickness

Mountain sickness may be experienced by travellers going to destination 3,000m (10,000ft) or more above sea level. A traveller is more likely to experience the symptoms of benign Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS) if he ascends rapidly, such as when flying to a high-altitude city or climbing up a steep mountain. The 2 types of malignant AMS include:

##### a) High Altitude Pulmonary Oedema (HAPE)

Fluid builds up in the lungs. This leads to breathlessness, cough and blueness of lips.

##### b) High Altitude Cerebral Oedema (HACE)

Fluid accumulates in the brain leading to drowsiness, unsteadiness and abnormal behaviors.

#### Treatment

- Evacuate the person to a lower altitude immediately
- Drug: Dexamethasone for HAPE & HACE and Nifedepine for HAPE
- Supplemental oxygen
- Individual pressurization in a portable compression system (e.g. Gamov bag).

#### Prevention

- Gradual ascent with rest days every 3,000ft above 9,000ft.
- Drugs: Acetazolamide (Diamox) 250mg tds or Dexamethasone 4mg bd or 4mg should be started one day before ascent and continued 2-3 days after reaching the high elevation.

#### Frostbite

Severe chilling of exposed or poorly insulated tissues (e.g. nose, cheek, chin, ears, hands and feet) can occasionally result in freezing with or without general chilling or hypothermia.

#### Treatment

- At the painful stage of impending frostbite, the treatment is stop, protect, insulate and re-warm the affected part.
- Keep warm in a room where a high temperature of 21¼ degrees C can be maintained. The affected part should be washed with antiseptic solution, bandaged lightly and elevated.
- Commence a course of antibiotics such as Penicillin and Paracetamol.

#### Prevention

- Keep an eye on wind chill index (air temperature/wind velocity).
- Wear adequate protective clothing with a neck and wrist opening so water vapour from sweat can escape.
- Well fitting socks and boots.
- Change wet clothing and have a hot meal.