

Altitude Awareness

Important Information for Visitors

Not Accustomed to Copper's High Altitude

Colorado's Rocky Mountains are among the most beautiful in American and we hope you will enjoy every minute of your visit. But some of the very features which make the high country so attractive may cause problems unless you recognize and know how to prevent them. Here's why:

As you go higher, barometric pressure decreases, the air is thinner and less oxygen is available. It's also colder and drier, and the ultraviolet rays from the sun are stronger. Each of these changes may have unpleasant effects on your body.

Altitude

Many popular resorts are 8,000 to 9,500 feet above sea level (Copper's base is 9,000'), and the mountain summits rise almost 3,000 feet higher. You will probably notice that your breathing is faster or deeper and you may feel short of breath, especially when you exercise. This is the body's first and most effective response to altitude. Your heart is likely to beat faster also; this too, is a helpful normal reaction.

However, you may also develop a headache, a touch of nausea, or unusual tiredness; some people even have trouble sleeping. Depending upon the altitude, 20% to 30% of all visitors from near sea level have one or several of these symptoms, which we call acute mountain sickness or AMS. Children and the elderly are slightly more susceptible.

These symptoms usually go away in a day or two. If they grow worse, or if you are worried, be sure to consult a doctor. If you develop a worsening cough, increasing shortness of breath, or feel like you have fluid in your lungs, see a doctor at once! Altitude illness, though usually minor, can become serious quite rapidly, so don't take it lightly or try to tough it out!

Before you leave home, you can do a few things to decrease the effects of altitude. Our studies show that spending two nights at a modest altitude like 5,000 feet (Denver) decreases symptoms when you go higher. Eat more foods which are high in carbohydrates, drink more water, and take less salt. Your doctor may be able to prescribe medication that will assist in lessening symptoms.

Once you arrive, take it easy for the first day or two. Reduce alcohol, caffeine, and salty foods. Drink more water than usual. Salt causes your body to retain fluid, which increases the severity of altitude illness.

Above all- listen to your body! Don't push! If you feel worse and worse, get help! Minor altitude symptoms occasionally become life threatening.

Temperature

The sun has more power in thin air, and a bad sunburn can spoil your stay. No matter how tanned you may be, use a protective cream. "Cold sores" are aggravated at altitude but might be prevented by various medications which your doctor can prescribe. Snow blindness – which is sunburn of the eyes – is a real danger, especially on new snow, and even on foggy or cloudy days. Wear sun glasses or goggles with ultraviolet protection.

Temperature falls about three degrees Fahrenheit for every 1,000 feet of altitude, and it can get cold very fast. Take extra clothes. Hypothermia (low body temperature) can occur even in the summer if you are wet or windchilled, hungry, tired, or poorly dressed. The warning signs are clumsiness, trouble thinking or talking clearly, irritability, and confusion. Watch for these in each other. If in doubt, stop, warm up, eat and drink, and if necessary send for help.

Water

The crisp mountain air is exhilarating, but it's also very dry. You lose much more water than you realize in exhaled air and from sweating. It's very important to maintain the body's water level, so drink two or three times more than you usually drink. Fill your canteen or water bottle in the hotel. Don't drink from streams. Juices and water are better than tea, coffee or alcohol. Remember that at high altitudes, one alcoholic drink does the work of two.

Injuries

Accidents can happen at any time to anyone, but they are more common when you are cold, tired, and hungry. Remember that lack of oxygen can blunt your judgment, leading you to do foolish things. Whether hiking, skiing, biking, swimming, or playing tennis, give your body plenty of food and water to function efficiently. Don't keep going when you are very tired; quit while you're ahead.

Illness

Of course, you are as likely to get a cold or flu or stomach trouble in the mountains as you are at home. But altitude illness feels very much like flu, or a hangover, and it can be a lot more serious. If you have any doubt, get medical help. Don't let ignorance or carelessness spoil your stay. There is a great personal joy, beauty, and spiritual peace to be discovered in the mountains. Treat yourself with respect and enjoy your visit.

Contact Information

- **If it is an emergency, dial 911**
- If you need medical assistance, there are hospitals located at Copper Mountain or in Frisco:

Copper Medical Center

Bridge End Building
Copper Mountain, CO 80443
970-968-2330
(Limited Hours: 8:30am-4:30pm)

St. Anthony Summit Medical Center

Highway 9 at Peak One Drive
Frisco, CO 80443
970-668-3300