High-Altitude Sickness

Source: TH

The recent death of a trekker from Kerala due to high-altitude sickness (HAS) or **Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS)** while attempting to scale a **peak in Uttarakhand** has brought attention to the dangers of trekking in the mountains.

- Popular trekking routes often exceed 3,000 meters, increasing the risk of **AMS** among unacclimatised trekkers.
- High-altitude sickness occurs when individuals ascend rapidly to elevations **above 2,400 meters**, without adequate acclimatisation.
    - As altitude rises, both air pressure and oxygen levels drop, causing hypoxia, which is a shortage of oxygen in the body's tissues.
    - **Symptoms** include headaches, nausea, fatigue, and shortness of breath.
- **Severe cases** of **HAS/AMS** can lead to **High Altitude Pulmonary Edema (HAPE) and High Altitude Cerebral Edema (HACE),** both life-threatening conditions requiring immediate descent.
    - At high altitudes, the body adapts by increasing breathing **(can cause hyperventilation) a**nd producing more red blood cells, thickening the blood and straining the heart.
    - **HAPE causes lung fluid buildup,** and worsening breathing, while **HACE leads to confusion, hallucinations, and coma.**
- **Treatment Strategies:**
    - Supplemental oxygen or a portable hyperbaric chamber can help alleviate symptoms of **AMS** and **HACE** in emergencies.
    - Pharmacological treatments, such as **acetazolamide and dexamethasone,** may provide short-term relief.

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HOW TO SAFELY CLIMB A MOUNTAIN

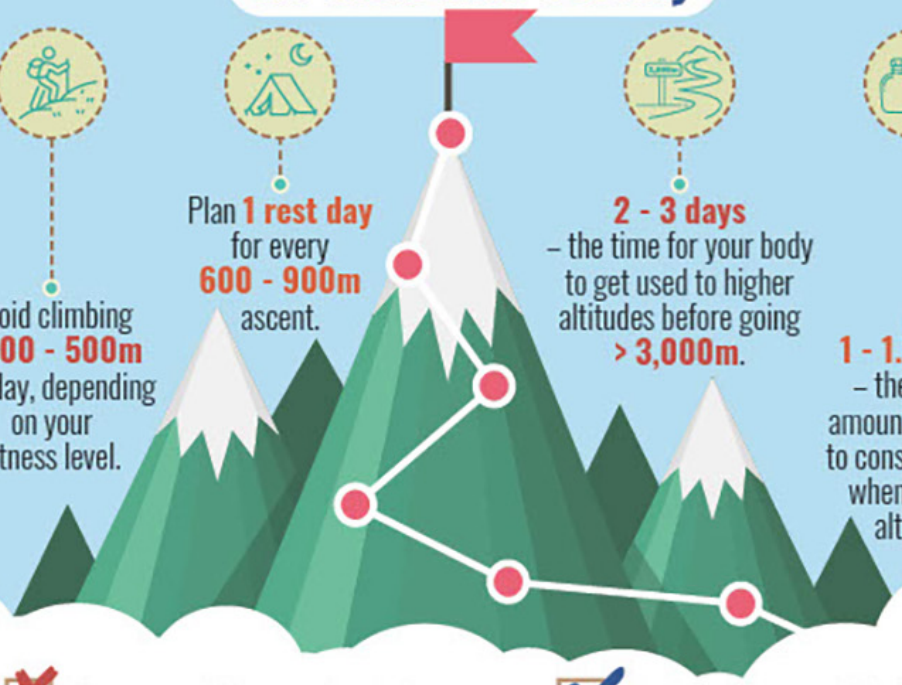
Go Slow And Steady

Avoid climbing **> 300 - 500m** per day, depending on your fitness level.

Plan **1 rest day** for every **600 - 900m** ascent.

2 - 3 days – the time for your body to get used to higher altitudes before going **> 3,000m**.

1 - 1.5 litres – the **extra** amount of water to consume daily when at high altitude.



✗ **Excess caffeine + alcohol**

✓ **Carbohydrate-rich diet**

Stay Aware

12 - 24 hours timeframe for symptoms of altitude sickness to emerge upon reaching higher elevation.

1 – 2 days Time for altitude sickness symptoms to improve as body acclimatises.

AMS symptoms:

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Sleep problems
- Appetite loss

HAPE/HACE symptoms:

- Confusion
- Shortness of breath
- Inability to walk
- Coughing white/ pink frothy substance
- Coma

300m Altitude at which AMS symptoms often improve. If symptoms worsen, descend immediately.

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