Fact Sheet: High Altitude

High altitude travel is generally considered travel above 8,000 feet. At 8,000 feet, there is only ~75 percent of the available oxygen at sea level. Oxygen decreases at ~3% with each 1,000 feet in elevation. UV intensity increases 4% for every 1,000 feet of elevation. Issues that can occur at high altitude include:

- Falls
- Sunburn
- Hypothermia
- Frostbite
- Altitude Sickness
- Snow Blindness

Personal Protective Equipment

- Sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Hat
- Warm clothing
- Sturdy boots
- Altimeter
- Ropes gear – if necessary

Preparation and Training

- Consult your primary care physician before the trip, especially if you have history with heart or lung disease or injury.
- Take a course in technical ropes training, if necessary.
- It is recommended you take courses in: Wilderness First Aid

General Safety

- Use sunscreen and sunglasses, even if weather is overcast.
- Maintain a slow, even pace.
- Breathe deeply.
- If your hike starts at high elevation, spend a few days adjusting to the altitude prior to hiking.
➤ It is best to sleep no more than 1,500 feet higher than you did the night before. This helps the body adjust gradually to the decreased amount of oxygen.
➤ Keep hydrated and well fed.
➤ Many people at high altitude have trouble sleeping due to altered breathing patterns. Do not take sleeping pills to address sleep issues at altitude.
➤ Humidity at high altitude can be low, which can aggravate the respiratory system and cause coughing fits. Breathing through a scarf or balaclava can help, as this will humidify and warm the air you breathe.
➤ Keep in mind emergency rescue services may have difficulty reaching your location. Do not take unnecessary risks.

References and Additional Resources

- Information for people traveling to high altitude from MedEx
- Adapted from High Altitude Fact Sheet, by University of Maryland: Department of Environmental Safety, Sustainability & Risk (https://essr.umd.edu/documents/fact-sheets) with permission.