



Newsletter AUG 2005

ASSISTANCE INTERNATIONAL SHANGHAI ONLINE

Tibet and Mountain sickness

Because of Tibet's high altitude, travelers with a pre-existing problem of heart, lungs or anaemia should consult a doctor before considering a visit. Most other travelers, once they are acclimatized, rarely suffer more than mild discomfort from the altitude. Acclimatization is the adjustment of the human body to the diminished supply of oxygen at high altitude.

Bone marrow produces quantities of extra red blood cells to take oxygen from the air in amounts needed for good health, a process that may take several days. Mountain sickness (also known as altitude sickness) is caused by an insufficient flow of oxygen to the brain and other vital organs. It can affect anybody above 3,000 meters. Each person has a different tolerance for altitude that has nothing to do with age, sex or fitness. One person will get a headache at 3,400 meters, another not until 5,500 meters. The symptoms of mountain sickness include headache, nausea and shortness of breath, singly or together. About half the people arriving in Lhasa suffer at least one symptom in the first two days before recovering. In nearly all cases, rest and two aspirins will relieve the discomfort.

However, the serious conditions of pulmonary and cerebral oedema also begin with these same symptoms. If a headache does not respond to aspirin or



a good night's rest, if a dry cough with frothy sputum develops, or if there are any signs of severe lethargy or poor coordination, go to hospital at once.

A lower altitude is the surest cure. Over-exertion contributes to mountain sickness, and dehydration may be a predisposing factor. Some precautions include: 1 Stick to a schedule of very mild activity and rest for the first two days. 1 Drink plenty of fluids. Four liters every day are recommended to maintain a clear, copious urine. 1 Don't smoke, or at least keep it to a minimum. 1 Avoid sedatives such as sleeping medicine or tranquilizers. They tend to depress respiration and limit oxygen intake. It is not unusual to wake up at night at high altitudes gasping for breath.

This complaint, known as "periodic breathing" and caused by a change in the brain's control of breathing while you sleep, is normally quite harmless. Normal breathing can be quickly restored by relaxation, rhythmic deep

breathing, and understanding that there is nothing to worry about.

Our recommendation.

If you are ill enough to need hospitalization, you should consider the following: 1 Which first: hospitalization or evacuation? If altitude sickness is the problem, no medical treatment can do more than relieve some of the symptoms, and you will still need to evacuate to a low altitude. If you can safely be moved, it is best to do this by the next morning's flight than going to local hospitals where medical facilities are very poor.

In case of serious illness, local hospitals are not recognized enough for providing good care. Evacuation to lower altitude is highly recommended as soon as possible.

The closest city that can provide good medical facilities is Chengdu in Sichuan province (around 1 hour by plane).

Through our network, transportation by commercial carrier can be arranged within 3 hours including medical escort, oxygen on board if necessary. Air ambulance for emergency situation can be arranged as well during day time only. The airport in Lhasa is opened from 8am to 5pm only.

For last two months, we have provided this service of medical evacuation by commercial carrier from Lhasa to Chengdu few times.



Information for OPS Coordinators

Lhasa: Capital of Tibet. Alt 11998 feet.
City tel code + 86 (891)

Chengdu: Capital of Sichuan province Alt 1738 feet
City tel code +86 (28)

Flight information:

Lhasa to Chengdu: 5 flights daily from 10am to 4.40pm

Recommended Hospital in Chengdu (with foreign department)

- West China Medical University (Huaxi Hospital)
- Sichuan Province People's Hospital

Assistance International Shanghai Online

24 hour Tel: +86 21 64847459

24 hour Fax: +86 21 64847460

