Fitness Related Basic Guidelines

On a trekking trip you will generally be hiking anywhere between four to eight hours a day, up and down mountain trails that are steep and rocky, and mostly at elevations above 10,000 feet.

Exercise at high altitude compounds physiologic stress. In addition, high altitude may create discomfort and symptoms of illness that you do not experience while exercising at lower elevations, such as shortness of breath, restlessness or sleeplessness at night, and headaches. You need to be in excellent health and top physical condition to enjoy such an experience, with adequate cardiovascular endurance, muscular strength, and excellent balance.

This level of fitness requires regular aerobic exercise for at least one hour 4-5 times a week. This may include aerobic fitness classes, power walking, jogging, cycling on hills, swimming, and cross-country skiing. Additionally, you must be able to sustain exercise for prolonged periods. Finally, you must have some experience with exercise at altitude.

We recommend that you start a moderate training program several months before departure, then slowly build up to a more strenuous level. Since training is highly sport specific, include some hiking or running in your program. Consult your physician if you have questions concerning your underlying health. We can help answer questions for you or your physician concerning required levels of fitness and health conditions at altitude. If you have concerns about your capacity to do this trip, we can suggest appropriate alternatives.

Here is a recommended program that should help to get you in good shape. This is only a guideline and can be adapted to your preferences. Consult a physician before commencing any new workout program.

Begin by working out a minimum of three days per week. Strike a good balance between aerobic workout and muscle strengthening. Outdoors, you can run, hike, or mountain bike on hilly terrain to best achieve the aerobic fitness component. Indoors at a gym, you can use the Stairmaster and treadmill wearing a backpack with some weight in it to substitute for the outdoor activities.

Work on muscle strengthening either by lifting weights or by doing pushups, sit-ups, and squats. Include a long hike on the weekend (there is no better way to train for a hiking trip than to hike !). After a few weeks increase your workouts to a minimum of four days per week.

Remember, a India trek can be the trip of a lifetime and you really want to enjoy it, so please take your training program seriously it will be worth it !

High Altitude

If you have hiked at 10,000 feet before, you will probably find that hiking at altitudes higher than that is simply an extension of your previous experience you will walk more slowly, rest more frequently, have some restlessness at night, and be subject to headaches. If your previous reaction to altitude has been nausea or other unpleasant symptoms, trekking in the Ladakh and Zanskar Himalaya may not be for you.

We design each of our treks to maximize altitude conditioning in the early part of the trek. However, be forewarned that there are no guarantees that your body will acclimatize properly. Any trip member who, in the opinion of the trip leader or trip doctor (if there is one), shows signs of potential acute mountain sickness (such as HAPE high

altitude pulmonary edema) will have no choice but to descend and remain at comfortable altitudes. The decision of the trip leader or trip doctor is final.

Altitude Sickness:

Trekking at High Altitude is very different from that at lower altitudes. If the trek is not well paced, or if the acclimatization is not complete, the trekker falls prey to high altitude sickness. High Altitude Sickness is not something related to ones physical fitness. The main cause of altitude sickness is inability of persons to adapt to the reduction in the level of oxygen at high altitude.

Mild symptoms of high altitude sickness like lightheaded / headaches and breathlessness is common even among the locals of the area after a long stay in the plains. However, when accompanied with nausea, dizziness, severe cough, swelling of face / hands (due to water retention), and disorientation, medical treatment is sought.

Anyone with severe symptoms would be transferred to the hospital and kept under observation. The only cure for such cases is sending the patient to the plains.

It is advisable for clients at high altitude to take it easy and rest for the first few days, which would help you in acclimatization. There is no medicine to cure High Altitude Sickness. Diamox has been used to help in acclimatization but it is advisable to consult your physician regarding it has side effects are there especially for those allergic to sulpha drugs. The best is to take plenty of water. Taking of alcohol is not advised at high altitude.

As long as one takes it easy and does not get too adventurous like trying the reach the highest point on arrival, mild symptom as mentioned earlier are common and not a cause for worry. Acclimatization is the best process.

HAPE (High Altitude Pulmonary Edema) andHACE (High Altitude Cerebral Edema)

Both these cases can be fatal in less than 24 hours if not diagnosed and treated in time. In both these cases, drugs like dexamethasone and Nifedepine (consult your doctor) are given to ease the symptoms but the ONLY cure is DESCENT, the patient needing immediate hospitalization and medical attention later.

HAPE :- The symptoms are continuous headache with dizziness accompanied by racking cough (fluid in the lungs), loss of appetite. It commonly affects the un-acclimatized especially who venture too quickly into the high mountain regions.

HACE :- It is swelling of the brain due to damage of brain tissues. The symptoms are headache, disorientation, irritability, and loss of appetite. HACE is rare but can be sudden and severe. Sudden collapse and death can happen within hours. Swelling of face and hands is accompanied with the above symptoms. For the above serious conditions as mentioned earlier, the only answer is DESCENT, DESCENT, and DESCENT

Snow blindness :- caused by strong concentration of ultra violet rays at high altitudes. Though very painful, it is curable.

Sunburn :- caused by reflection of ultra violet rays from the snow.

Frost Bite :- freezing of skin and deeper tissues, occurs at temperatures below freezing and usually affects nose, ears, fingers, toes and feet. If immediate treatment is given, the individual may recover completely otherwise it may develop into blisters and gangrene depending on the severity of exposure.