



**SWS Mountain Guides**  
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## Some General Information

### Food, Feet, Drink, Hygiene, Altitude, Attitude and You

One of the definitions of adventure is when the outcome of an undertaking is uncertain. By this definition mountaineering indeed, qualifies. We go to the mountains for many reasons, but a common one for most people is the adventurous nature of the experience. But the same variables that contribute to the feelings of joy and excitement we can get in the mountains can also cause problems and discomfort if not taken into account by those planning an adventure into the alpine world. A brief overview of the more critical issues concerning the health and safety of all hikers or mountaineers and their impact on the mountains is provided to help you take more control over your well-being while on your trip.

**Altitude:** As altitude is gained and the atmospheric pressure drops, there is less available oxygen in the air. The percentage of oxygen remains the same, but there is less per given volume. At 18,000 feet, the atmospheric pressure and oxygen pressure in the air are only half that at sea level. Our bodies undergo complex and not fully understood changes to compensate for the lack of oxygen. At average heights (8,000'-10,000'), most people coming from a sea-level start to notice shortness of breath that can progress to tiredness, headache, and flu-like symptoms. Usually, this will subside after a day or two at altitude. At higher elevations, these problems can be much more severe.

It takes longer than the length of most trips to acclimate to altitude fully, but there are a few things you can do to facilitate the process: 1) Spend the night before your journey begins at the trailhead campground or lodge—about 6,000 ft. Elevations seem to be optimum for most people. Giving you ahead starts with the altitude. 1) Try and be well-rested, fed, and hydrated at the start of your trip. 2) Avoid alcohol and other drugs immediately before and during your journey. 3) Drink lots of water and reduce caffeine intake. 4) Pace yourself. Breathe. Slow and steady is the way to go.

**Hydration:** How much water do you think you drink on a typical day at home or work? Most of us need to drink at least 4-6 quarts in a day of climbing or hiking more on hotter days. That's a lot more than most people drink in the city, but drinking enough water is the most natural thing to avoid altitude, fatigue, heat, and cold problems. Dehydration is a contributing factor to almost all health problems in the mountains. Do not include caffeine or alcoholic drinks when gauging your fluid intake. They dehydrate your body. We encourage using "Sports Drinks" – they help replace lost electrolytes. Besides, they make the water you need to drink more appealing – something that's important in a situation where natural hunger and thirst responses are suppressed.

**Food:** When SWS Mountain Guides provide freeze-dried dinners, breakfasts, and hot drinks, you will have a selection of items to choose from to accommodate the different dietary needs or desires. – we know how much and what kind of foods are best for each type of activity. You are bringing snacks and lunches; there are some important choices to consider. Contrary to the popular image of increased appetites in the "Great Outdoors," most people experience diminished appetites at the increased altitudes of most of our seminars. Though your body is working much harder and using up to 5,000-10,000 calories a day, or roughly twice the regular expenditure, many times, you won't feel like eating why it's essential to make every calorie count. Choose foods high in complex carbohydrates for sustained energy, and have flavors you strongly like. Remember that this is one place fats are okay. You won't have to worry about gaining weight – many folks lose weight on a trip! Try to eat small amounts frequently – even if you don't feel like it. On our more strenuous trips, you'll get used to your guide urging you to eat, eat, eat. Finger foods work best, so look for whole-grain bars, trail mixes (usually labeled "super" or "deluxe"), dried fruit, "Sport" bars, energy bars, bagels, hard cheese (yes, it will go bad, but for several days) and another compact, tasty choices. Go for as much variety as possible, but remember, you've got to eat it, or the weight in your pack is wasted – so forget the jar of peanut butter, bring the shelled peanuts.

**Sanitation:** Human waste should be disposed of at least 200 feet from trails, campsites, and water sources. Solid human waste should be buried 6-8 inches underground in mineral soil, and toilet paper should be packed out or burned. There are other methods for waste disposal depending on the particular environment and the location of your trip; your guide will provide more information on that waste disposal system. Staying clean in the backcountry is not as easy as in the city. Soap has no place in the mountains, but individually packaged alcohol towelettes or wet wipes are great for cleaning hands, a task that is just as important in the mountains as it is at home, especially when preparing or handling food.



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**Foot care:** Even perfect feet in the best boots can be prone to problems. A bad blister can ruin a trip, so it's essential to fix irritating hot spots before they become serious trouble. Hot spots on your feet caused by friction between your foot and boot should be repaired with moleskin when they first appear. Don't worry about slowing down the group to stop; most folks appreciate the break. Come prepared with plenty of moleskins and some Vaseline. An inexpensive and efficient blister prevention technique is a thin layer of petroleum jelly (Vaseline) applied to all potentially troublesome areas. It is a bit messy, so be prepared for stained sock liners, but happier feet!

**Impact:** Our prime directive when in the backcountry merely is to "Leave No Trace" leave it as we found it, maybe even a little better. That means no noodles in the lake bottom, no tent burns in the meadows, and no toilet paper blowing around. Wood fires are used only in emergencies; small backpacking stoves are easier to cook with. We must remember that we are only visitors passing through a fragile environment when in the mountains. Your guide is a "Leave No Trace" instructor and will instruct you on the proper procedures in your particular environment. Any questions, ask your guide.

**Packing:** If you doubt something on the equipment list or have any questions, please give our office a call. Feel free to take extra items in the car with you. We will be doing a pack check at the trailhead or an SWS office, and you can ask your guide about bringing them along. In the mountains, having the proper equipment can save your life. You must get all the items on the equipment list. Our guides try to bring some extra gear with them to the trailhead, plus we have rentals and equipment for sale at our offices, but they can only do so much. If you fail to bring the proper equipment, SWS Mountain Guides reserves the right to send you home without a refund. Also, you will be required to carry your share of the group equipment (food, stoves, tents), so leave some extra room in that pack! As always, give us a call if you have any questions. Remember, the summit is only 49% of the climb... Getting to the top of a mountain can be the easy part of the climb. Now that you're on top, you've to get down, only now you're tired, clouds are building, and napping sounds more like what you'd rather be doing. Don't forget to budget enough mental and physical energy for the descent. Remember, summits only count when you've returned safely to the cars and can tell someone about it!

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