



# ALTITUDE SICKNESS

By Helen K. Kelley

**A**ltitude sickness, also called acute mountain sickness, is caused by climbing or walking to a higher and higher altitude too quickly, not giving the enough time to adapt to the lower air pressure and oxygen level in the higher elevation. To understand more about altitude sickness and how to prevent or treat it, we spoke with three Atlanta area physicians who shared their expertise and experience.

## Symptoms, prevention and the heart of the matter

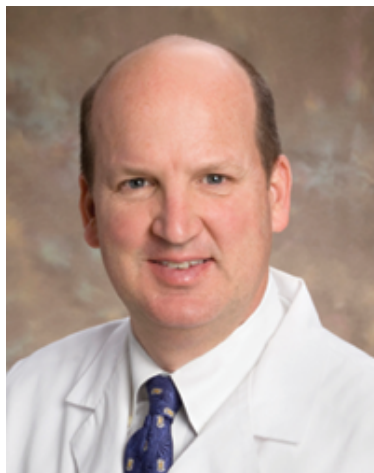
At higher altitudes, the barometric pressure decreases, resulting in fewer oxygen molecules available to breathe, ultimately

resulting in decreased oxygen delivery to tissues. According to Andrew Smith, M.D., a cardiologist and Medical Director of the Advanced Heart Failure Program at Emory Healthcare, this decreased oxygen availability causes a number of physiological symptoms identified with altitude sickness.

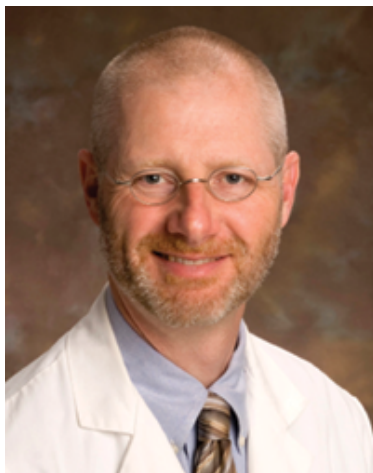
“With the decreased oxygen availability to the tissues, the result is an increased release of adrenalin, which can cause increase in heart rate and also possibly an increase in pulmonary artery pressures,” he said. “Additionally, what occurs within this is an increase in respiratory rate, and therefore, hyperventilation occurs, at least initially. Resting heart rate increases. Often the humidity tends to be lower at high altitudes, so, along with the increased adrenaline drive, there is a tendency to become dehydrated.”

Along with dehydration, people who are experiencing altitude sickness may have symp-

**For those who are traveling to higher elevations, Smith says there are a number of measures they can take to prevent the symptoms.**



Andrew Smith, M.D.



Allen Dollar, M.D.



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