

# Living at 9,000

What strikes people most about the mountains is the air. It seems to be “thin,” not much of it around. But that is a paradox. The clear, crisp clean air is simultaneously soothing and energizing. High-altitude air, however, requires both an explanation and a word of warning.

The truth is that there is plenty of oxygen at higher altitudes, just less atmospheric pressure to propel the oxygen into your lungs. This is what leaves you gasping for air. The body responds to the decrease in oxygen by breathing faster. The “thin air” causes headaches and nausea. Most common at 8,000ft or above, the symptoms usually start within a few hours of coming to a higher altitude.

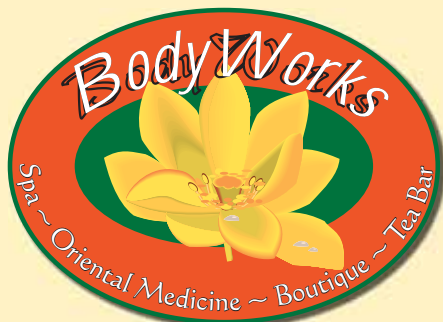
Staying hydrated plays a major role in preventing altitude sickness. Drink a big glass of water when you first arrive. Coffee and tea do not count. Drink water, however, don't drink water from lakes and streams. Giardia, a microorganism from the excrement of beavers, deer and other mammals, lives in those waters. Giardia can cause debilitating diarrhea and vomiting. Enough said.

Whether or not you get altitude sickness has nothing to do with your fitness level or age. Even the most fit can experience some altitude sickness. The good news is that symptoms disappear once the body adjusts to the low-oxygen atmosphere. (If symptoms don't subside in 48 hours, however, see a doctor.)

## More Red Blood Cells

The relative decrease of the oxygen content in the air requires the body to create more red blood cells to increase its uptake of oxygen. It takes the body about two months to increase the red blood cell count enough to fully accommodate the change in oxygen content that happens when you move from sea level to Grand County.

The higher altitude is a great factor for athletes. Living at higher altitudes increases their performance at lower altitudes. In most cases, athletes that train at high



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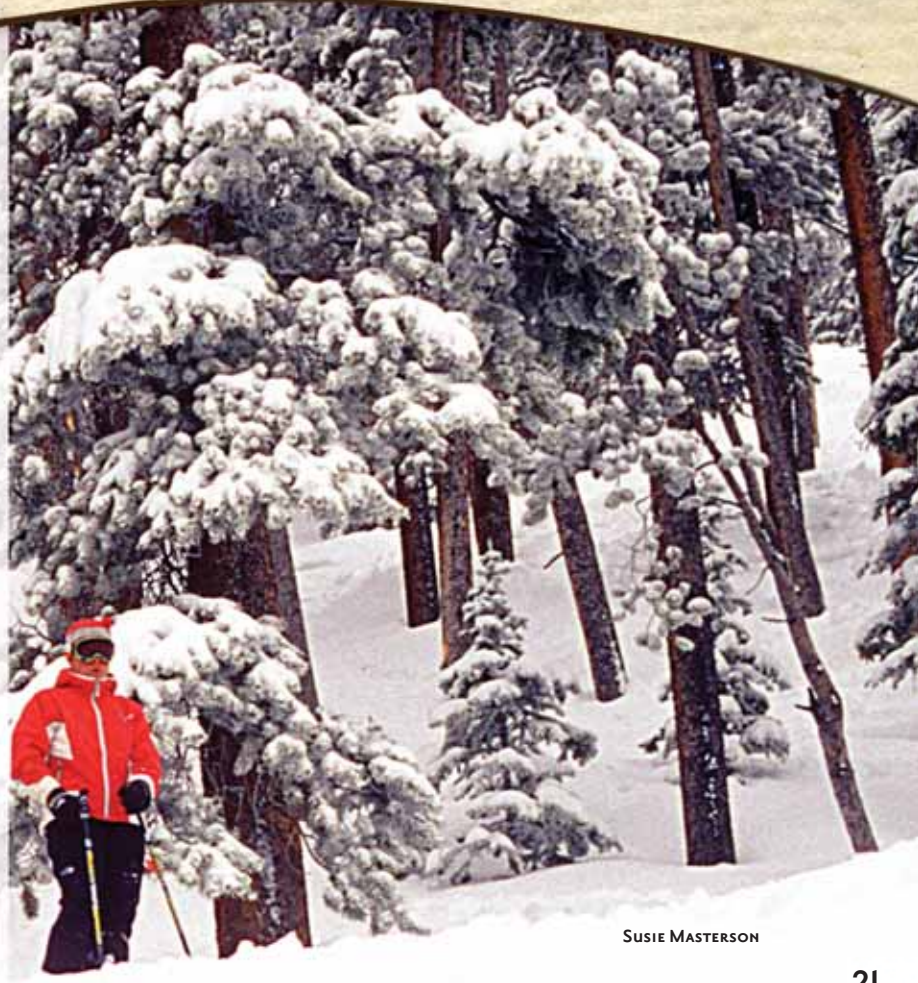
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# 0 0 FEET



SUSIE MASTERSON

altitudes will likely compete in lower-elevation locales. That is when the increased red blood cells and the increased ability to carry more oxygen make a difference in performance.

Note: It is important to pay attention to your health status before visiting or exercising strenuously in high altitude. If you have a heart condition or are not in very good cardiovascular shape, being at high altitude can put an increased strain on your body.

## Caution

The drier climate, higher altitude and different outdoor pollens can trigger allergy reactions. Hay, horses, plants, grasses, even materials used in some structures can trigger an allergic reaction. If you have active allergy symptoms or unstable asthma, see a physician.

## Heed This

Physical pain is the body's last call for help, not the first. By the time you feel pain, your body has left a balanced state. That is why preventative work is important. If you are relatively healthy, the increase in red blood cells and overall circulatory efficiency are a bonus.

## Is it the Air?

Grand County is one of the top counties in the country for longevity. Residents here live longer than most people – 79 years. For Colorado, it's 75 years. United States: men – 74.1 years, women – 79.5 years. A perspective: In 1901 in the United States, the average life span was 49 years.

## Cheers!

Colorado is one of the healthiest states in the country. Colorado is near the top in rankings in national surveys with the lowest obesity rate in the nation, a low smoker number (20%) and a large number of Coloradans who exercise regularly. This, however, may change as children become adults. The activity level of Colorado's children ranks 35th among the states, although our youngsters have the third lowest obesity rate in the nation.



## GRAND COUNTY

Rural Health Network, Inc.

### HEALTH ADVISOR

81 West Agate  
Granby, CO 80446  
887-3064  
www.gcruralhealth.com

887-1711  
24 hours/day, 365 days/year  
The Health Advisor provides health information, community resources and physician referrals.

### Goals of the Network

- Meet the growing needs of the population;
- Provide access to and delivery of health care services locally;
- And reduce the amount of care obtained outside the county

Planned building projects will meet the demand for new technology, provide tools for recruitment and retention of physicians, and allow providers to collaborate in providing new and better services county-wide.

- Medical Campus in Granby
- Replacement Hospital in Kremmling

### ACHES

Advocacy for Children's Health and Education Services

Purpose: To assist families with children under the age of 18

Eligibility: Financial – Contact Public Health or school nurse