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Health and Fitness

Herewith a few brief pointers on general fitness and health. A lot has been written on the subject and if you want more details I am sure you will find references in the Library.

FITNESS

We all suffer the same pre-trip 'busy-ness.' However it is vitally important, if you are going to get a decent return on your not-inconsiderable investment, that you start the trip *FIT*.

The best preparation for walking and climbing in the mountains is - walking up hills! If I haven't been out for a week or two I find a steep track and push up it as fast as I can. After a few days of this I start carrying weight in the form of 1litre plastic milk bottles full of water. Thus I start using my pack with some load on board. I sometimes wear my mountain/trekking boots – if they are new - but this takes time and is expensive in boot soles too. At most, work up to a maximum of 15kg/33lb carried up 200m/660ft in 20 minutes or 300m/1000ft in 30 minutes. If you can get a 1000m/3300ft climb aim for 2 hours with 15kg on board.

As an alternative don't take the pack, but reduce your time allowed by 20%. I'm not an exercise physiologist but I feel that frequency is probably more important than a single massive effort. Thus, at least 30 minutes' fast up-walk three or four days a week will be preferable to one long Sunday bash. Regardless, the exercise must be convenient and fit your schedule otherwise it will soon get dropped. Do whatever suits you best but do *not* overdo it, especially early on. If you find that you are tired or not looking forward to going out, lay off for a couple of days and/or reduce your routine.

Note that the water bottles mentioned above are carried uphill full, emptied at the top and carried down empty. Do not flog downhill fast repeatedly – your knees, ankles and back will not thank you and you'll soon get sore and stop training.

One and two litre milk or juice bottles make useful load increments as, miraculously, the kilos they weigh are the same as the litres!

DIET

(a) A note on carbohydrate loading is attached. Whilst it sounds rather severe the general principles outlined are a sound base to work on.

(b) Water consumption: I have found it difficult to *suddenly* increase my intake of fresh water to several litres a day as required when going to altitude. Get used to drinking more water at least a couple of months before the trip starts. A big glass of fluid before each meal will not only help weight reduction and flush the system – it will aid your exercise routine. Juice, tea and coffee are all ok but water is best.

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GENERAL HEALTH

- (a) We do our best to ensure clean eating and drinking throughout the trip. Iodine drops will be used for all water outside main towns and sufficient dropper bottles of Iodine will be supplied. Iodine does taint water slightly in stronger concentrations and if you really cannot stand the taste you should bring a supply of 'Puritabs' or similar. Allow enough for 4 litres a day. Note that 'Puritabs' do not kill Giardia.
- (b) "Delhi Belly" - otherwise known as the "Kathmandu Trots" - seems to be a part of travel in the third world. Acute episodes have caused people to miss out on their peak, or even be invalided off the the trip and home to hospital. Close attention to hand-washing and checking with others on the source of salads, peeled fruit and ice blocks will help avoid this unpleasant condition. I have found that immediate 'Immodium' deals with a slight disturbance. However, the only real cure for advanced diarrhoea is several days on 'Gastrolyte' or similar. Hence the quantity shown in the personal first aid list.
- (c) Sleep routines do get disturbed. Light sleepers will find a mild sleeping tablet, ear plugs and an airline eye cover useful.
- (d) Inspect your trekking and high mountain footwear three months ahead. Will it stand 30 days intensive use? And if it's new, is it sufficiently broken in? It is a good idea to try out all sock/shoe/boot combinations whilst exercising.
- (e) Dental Health – ensure you have a complete dental check before the trip. For any trips heading above 6000m for a number of days please get the single full mouth X-ray called 'Panafax' or similar. This is comparatively inexpensive and, because it shows the tooth roots and jaw is more likely to show up potential deep seated problems. Abscesses seem to be provoked by cold, altitude, stress etc., and over the years we have had three or four expedition members retiring unhappily with serious mouth pain.

Please feel free to call, write or fax at any time if you have concerns over health, gear or anything else. Do it sooner rather than later so that we have time to help you.

All the best,

Shaun Norman