

SKILLS

START

You're halfway through a great weeklong trip when something feels wrong. Is it cramps?

muscle stomach no

Do you have nausea or vomiting?
yes no

Are you disoriented?
huh? no

At altitude?
yes no



ACUTE MOUNTAIN SICKNESS

Symptoms Fatigue, headache, nausea, disorientation, loss of breath, aches
Prevent Acclimatize: If coming from sea level, camp at 8,000 feet before attempting to go higher. Ascend at most 2,000 feet each day and then camp. Hydrate.
Treat Stop ascent; hydrate. If symptoms don't subside in 24-48 hours, descend.

Had diarrhea for days?
no yes

DEHYDRATION
Rest and water will cure what ails you.

SEE A DOCTOR!

This dangerous mix of symptoms goes beyond backcountry illnesses. Get help.

UPSET STOMACH

You may have pushed it with that 10-day-old summer sausage. Wait for the pain to, um, pass.

HEAT EXHAUSTION
Mercury rises, down you go.

Symptoms Headache, fatigue, nausea. Plus, disorientation can hit as heat stroke strikes.
Prevent Rest and drink fluids; 2 weeks before hike, exercise regularly in heat to acclimatize.
Treat Rest in shade, hydrate, and douse yourself with water.

Are you rashy?
no yes bull's-eye

Headache?
yes no

YOU'RE FINE

Nothing to see here, folks. All systems go, so keep hiking.

Is it bloody?
sigh, yes ew! no!



GIARDIA

Symptoms Nausea, fatigue, GI distress, low-grade fever
Prevent Giardia is a protozoa found in backcountry water sources—even some pristine-looking ones. Boil, treat, or filter all water, and keep good hygiene: Wash up with soap or alcohol-based hand sanitizer after privy stops.
Treat Pop Imodium to slow output: Two tablets for adults after each bowel movement—up to six tablets in 24 hours.



CAMPYLOBACTER

Symptoms Nausea, fatigue, fever, and GI distress 2 to 10 days after infection.
Prevent Boil, treat, or filter all backcountry water. Wash up post-cathole or apply hand sanitizer liberally.
Treat Take Imodium (see Giardia for dosing guidelines), and drink water or a sports drink with up to 8% carbohydrates (more than this slows rehydration) until urine is clear. Most people are symptom-free within 10 days. In rare cases, arthritis or temporary paralysis can result.



LYME DISEASE

You've been targeted.

Symptoms Fatigue, headache, ache, rash
Prevent Check all over body for poppy- to apple-seed-size deer ticks. Deet on skin and permethrin on clothes deter bites. Ticks must feed 24 hours before Lyme transmits. Remove them with sterilized tweezers: Grab near the head and gently pull straight back.
Treat If a bull's-eye rash develops, see a doctor asap; early Lyme is easier to treat.

Itchy?
yes no

On the feet?
yes no

Do you have any muscle pain?
yes no

Muscle aches?
no yes

Is your throat closing?
no yes!

TENSION HEADACHE

Many triggers, but no definite cause. Drink water, take two aspirin, and keep hiking.

Do you have a runny nose?
no sniff

Fever?
yes no

Are you having trouble breathing?
no cough! cough!



WEST NILE VIRUS

Skeeters are today's scariest critters.
Symptoms Fatigue, aches, headache, fever, and disorientation
Prevent For 8 hours of protection, cover exposed skin with 25% to 35% deet bug dope (3M Ultrathon: \$10, 3M.com), and treat clothes by soaking them in permethrin and letting them dry.
Treat Hike out slowly; West Nile Virus saps strength and can even cause paralysis and vision loss. There is no treatment, but most people (80%) show no symptoms and recover within several weeks.



HANTAVIRUS

Inhaling the vapor of infected rodent excrement messes with your lungs.
Symptoms Fatigue, shortness of breath, fever, aches, and headache
Prevent Avoid areas with evidence of mice. If you must camp at a spot with mice signs, hold your breath and use a tree branch to sweep out shelters and campsites between Texas and Washington.
Treat Symptoms take up to 5 weeks to develop. Two in 5 cases are fatal; no cure exists. Hike out and get to a doc asap for 2 weeks of aggressive pulmonary support.

CHAFING

Blame moisture and skin-on-skin friction. Grease up with Body Glide (\$6 for 1.3 oz.; bodyglide.com).

ATHLETE'S FOOT

If OTC remedies don't kill the fungus, see a doc for an Rx anti-fungal. To prevent, dry feet before donning socks, and change them often.



ROCKY MOUNTAIN SPOTTED FEVER

One bite, and you're a Dalmatian.

Symptoms Fatigue, headache, aches, fever, nausea, rash—and small, flat, pink spots
Prevent Check armpits, hairline, behind ears, and crown of the head for lentil-size American dog or Rocky Mountain wood ticks. Pull them out using same method as for deer ticks (see Lyme Disease); ticks must feed for 10 hours before bacterial disease transfers.
Treat Within two days of spots appearing on palms and soles (or if malaise follows a bite), see a doc for a 5- to 10-day antibiotic course. Note: One-third of cases present no rash.



POISON OAK, IVY, SUMAC

Leaves of three, next time let them be.

Symptoms Rash
Prevent Know 'em, avoid 'em. If you brush against poison oak, ivy, or sumac, cleanse area with alcohol or gasoline (use new wipes each time), then scrub with soap and water, to wash off the rash-causing oil urushiol.
Treat Wash rash to remove urushiol; apply calamine and wet cloth 3-4 times/day. Prednisone's prescribed for bad cases. Rash clears in 1-3 weeks.

COMMON COLD

Like your doctor says: Rest and drink plenty of fluids. Symptoms usually clear fully in 1-2 weeks.



SEASONAL INFLUENZA

Shouldn't have shared that spork.

Symptoms Fever, aches, fatigue, runny nose
Prevent Proper hygiene and a vaccine. Wash hands often with soap and water for 15 seconds, don't touch your mucous membranes (eyes and nostrils), and avoid sick people—the flu is contagious for up to a week after symptoms first present.
Treat Hike out if able and manage symptoms. Rest until 24 hours after fever breaks; control high fevers with Tylenol.

KEY

Your guide to backcountry illness

Unknown Least deadly Most deadly

Deadly Contagious Wildlife vector Geographically isolated Sudden onset

Am I Dying?

Sometimes you're screwed. And sometimes it just feels that way. Learn which symptoms should scare you—and how to treat them—with our diagnostic chart. By Casey Lyons



PHOTO BY COREY RICH / AURORA PHOTOS