

# Sickle Cell Disease and High Altitude

## High-Altitude Tips for Individuals Living With Sickle Cell Disease (SCD)



### HIGH ALTITUDE RISKS FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH SCD

- Increased risk of sickling crises due to lower oxygen levels
- Higher risk of splenic infarction (tissue death in the spleen)
- High altitude sickness, which includes the following symptoms: fatigue, headache, dizziness, and shortness of breath



### LIVING IN COLORADO WITH SCD

- Denver (5,280 ft) and other high-altitude cities pose greater risks for SCD patients.
- As of 2019, 435 individuals with SCD live in Colorado, mostly in urban areas.



### ACCLIMATIZATION AND PRECAUTIONS

- The general population adjusts to higher altitudes in 3-5 days, but individuals with SCD may never fully acclimate.
- Prolonged exposure to high altitudes is discouraged for individuals with SCD.



### HIGH ALTITUDE TIPS FOR THOSE WITH SCD

- Consult a doctor before traveling or moving to a high-altitude area.
- If traveling to a high altitude region, monitor for symptoms of high altitude sickness such as headaches, fatigue, or difficulty breathing.
- Avoid overexertion and allow your body to rest.



### AIR TRAVEL TO HIGH ALTITUDES

- Hydration is crucial before, during, and after air travel.
- Compression socks and a heating pad may be helpful during air travel.
- Commercial planes are generally safe for those with SCD, but smaller, unpressurized aircraft may pose risks. Check with your doctor before flying if you have concerns.

*These resources were researched and gathered by intern Maryanne Aremu as part of her college capstone project. We greatly appreciate her work and insights on this project.*

