

Your Body at 7,000 Feet

A quick guide to altitude, dry air & heat in Flagstaff · Dr. Sara Hazel · Barefoot Sage Center

Many people are surprised that their first days in Flagstaff leave them tired, out of breath, or challenged in unexpected ways. Altitude, low humidity, and sometimes heat can take you off guard — and even people who drink more water run into poor endurance, poor sleep, cramping, and dizziness. **Water without salt and electrolytes is one of the most preventable problems I see. Around here, salty snacks are medicine.**

The first days

About **1 in 4** visitors to mountain resort towns get altitude sickness — usually a headache with fatigue, nausea, or dizziness. Most cases start in the **first 12 hours**, and nearly all symptoms show up in the first 3 days. Higher is harder: the top of Snowbowl (11,500 ft) is a bigger ask than downtown.

Go easier for the first few days. Aerobic capacity drops about 6% per 1,000 meters of elevation — it's physiology, not fitness. The body adapts in days.

Water, salt & electrolytes. Don't wait for thirst — it's an unreliable signal for many people, especially older adults and menopausal women. Drink steadily, pair water with salt and electrolytes, and eat real, salty food on the trail. Extra plain water hasn't been shown to prevent altitude sickness — and at the Grand Canyon, too much water without salt is a known cause of rescue calls.

Women & hormones

Women in hormonal transition and menopause can be extra sensitive to water and mineral imbalances — sodium, potassium, magnesium, even calcium. Falling estrogen and progesterone affect how the kidneys balance water and minerals, and hot flashes add sweat loss. The result can be fatigue, brain fog, cramping, swelling, and dizziness. Rest, hydration, and the *right amount* of the right minerals help. How much of each mineral should often be individualized: the problem is usually too little, but too much causes problems too.

Sleep & sun

Sleep: a lighter, more broken first night or two is common and usually settles. Plan your big day for later in the trip.

Sun: UV rises with elevation and snow multiplies it. Hat, sunglasses, and mineral sunscreen — even on cool days.

When it's more than altitude

Call 911 or go to the ER for: breathlessness at rest · a cough that won't quit or brings up frothy mucus · confusion or stumbling · chest pain · fainting or seizure · symptoms getting worse, not better.

Flagstaff Medical Center ER · 1200 N. Beaver St · (928) 773-2113

NAH Urgent Care – Jasper · 1895 N. Jasper Dr · (928) 913-8800

NAH Urgent Care – Woodlands · 2700 S. Woodlands Village Blvd · (928) 440-5406

Urgent Ortho (sprains, fractures) · 1840 N. Jasper Dr · (928) 226-2900

Water, electrolytes & mineral sunscreen

Natural Grocers · 503 W. Clay Ave

Whole Foods Market · 320 Cambridge Ln

Sprouts Farmers Market · 1540 S. Riordan Ranch St

Community Market · Sundays, City Hall (through Oct 25)

Hats, water bottles & gear

Babbitt's Backcountry · 12 E. Aspen Ave

Aspen Sports · 15 N. San Francisco St

Mountain Sports · 24 N. San Francisco St

REI Co-op · 323 S. Windsor Ln

Run, ride & walk

Run Flagstaff · store + group runs · 204 E. Route 66

NATRA · free Saturday 8 AM trail runs · natra.org

Urban Trails & Buffalo Park · flagstaff.az.gov

The Barefoot Trail · 1-mile barefoot loop at 7,200 ft · Bellemont, I-40 Exit 185 · Wed–Sun through Oct 25

Recover from the miles. We specialize in the aches and pains of runners, hikers, and skiers — clinical & therapeutic massage, reflexology, and contrast therapy. (928) 444-9411