

Diving and sea sickness

Divers can suffer badly from sea sickness while they are on diving safaris. We therefore receive lots of queries about what sea sickness medication is compatible with diving.

Sea sickness is a form of **kinetosis**, literally translated as “motion sickness”. As the name suggests, this can occur at sea, in a car, aeroplane or train. Symptoms such as nausea, vomiting, dizziness and sweating are very unpleasant and may in rare cases lead to circulatory collapse.

This is caused because the brain is being sent various messages. The sense of balance reports: The ground is swaying beneath me. However, the feet report: The ground I’m standing on is still. Sooner or later the brain gives up and reports back: I don’t feel well!

Prevention

To stop this from happening, there is first some advice to prevent sea sickness:

1. Don’t eat or drink too much before boat trips. Having a stomach that is too full causes nausea.
2. Consuming coffee and alcohol may make nausea worse.
3. During the boat trip, stay amidships and don’t go below deck, watch the horizon, don’t stare at the cabin walls at all, don’t read or assemble diving equipment.
4. Only go into the water when you don’t feel nauseous. Experience suggests that nausea goes away from depths of 3 to 5 metres if waves are normal.
5. Drink enough fluids (water if possible) immediately before diving and then go into the water straight away. Taking on enough fluids significantly reduces the risk of decompression sickness, even if sea sickness hits again after the dive and nausea and vomiting only start then.

Physical measures

Unfortunately, there are not yet any travel sickness medicines that are totally compatible with diving. All remedies have adverse effects on the central nervous system such as drowsiness, delayed reactions, visual disturbances, lack of coordination or dizziness.

We will start with a few simple measures.

According to the principles of acupuncture, there are two points on the body which can be stimulated to reduce dizziness and nausea. Even pressing on these Nei Guan or He Gu points reduces sea sickness. “Sea Bands” are a more simple alternative. These are elastic armbands fitted with a raised plastic button that stimulate the Nei Guan point.

Medicinal measures

Ginger, whether fresh or part of a preparation, is a versatile natural remedy which calms the stomach and can help with sea sickness.

Vitamin C can reduce the level of histamine in the blood and thus prevent sea sickness - either in the form of food, or as a dose of 2 grams per day, preferably starting the day before the journey commences.

The effect of many naturopathic remedies has not been adequately proven by studies - however, the ones mentioned here are compatible with diving.

Of the travel sickness and sea sickness medications usually used in the EU, only a few antihistamines are advisable in conjunction with diving – with reservations. These include cinnarizine and dimenhydrinate, although it must be noted that these may also cause significant side effects and interactions with other medications and may reduce cognition and awareness to such an extent that the safety of a dive may be affected. You should therefore check your tolerance when you are not diving and the medication should be taken 5–12 hours before the planned boat trip.

Conclusion

It is better to avoid medication when diving! Finally, there is one more consolation: reactions to movement can be trained. Almost everyone who is at sea for long enough gets used to the swaying. Some sooner - others later.

Sources

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