



Vail Mountain Rescue – Newsletters

Rev Up Your Common Sense for Hunting Season



It may be surprising, but hunting season can be a busy time for search and rescue in Eagle County. We often find that rescued hunters have common, but avoidable, problems: underlying health conditions, stamina, altitude problems, getting lost, and, occasionally, getting shot. We hope this article provides helpful tips.

Some hunters don't realize that latent or controlled **health conditions** may resurface more intensely at high altitude, amplified even more by our dry climate. Heart ailments, asthma and emphysema are cases in point. VMRG is often called from hunting camps to evacuate hunters showing symptoms of heart disease or having severe breathing difficulties. The only cure is to get them out of the woods to a higher level of medical care as soon as possible.

Significant **physical stamina** is needed to move through the woods, even more so at altitude. Trails are few, and hunting is prohibited within 100 feet of them, so hunters bushwhack their way through the woods, uphill and down. While hunters might camp in a group, they often choose to hunt alone, adding to their bushwhacking effort. When stamina runs out, decision making ability can become strained, leading to problems including disorientation and becoming lost.

Some hunters arrive from sea level without taking time to become accustomed to the **altitude**. Headache, dizziness, and upset stomach are symptoms of simple Acute Mountain Sickness. More serious are High Altitude Pulmonary Edema or High Altitude Cerebral Edema. The first treatment for any of these conditions is to get the subject to a lower altitude.

Hunters with no health, stamina or altitude problems who simply **get lost** are another typical group. They are usually experienced hunters at home, but they forget the essentials for navigation in the high country— map, compass and GPS along with the skill to use them. The lucky ones are dressed for the weather, have some wilderness experience, and will camp out for the night only to be found by VMRG after a one or two day search. For unprepared hunters, this time alone in the wilderness is uncomfortable and dangerous.

Finally, there is a small group of hunters who either shoot themselves or are shot by other hunters. **Gunshot wounds** at any altitude are serious and response times critical. Once found, VMRG can stop the bleeding and evacuate the patient, but they have to be found in time.

Common sense and preparation can help you avoid these problems:

- If you have health issues, don't come to high altitude to hunt without medical consultation.
- If you feel sick, don't wait, go to lower altitude. Drink plenty of water.
- Know the area and have a map, compass and GPS and keep track of your route back to camp.
- If you are going really far into the bush, consider renting a satellite telephone for emergencies.
- If trouble strikes, contact 911 as soon as you can by voice or text.

VMRG is just a call away, but we have to know you're in trouble. And remember that our hiking time and ability to find you is somewhat easier if you are at a base camp, but very difficult if you are out in the woods. Nighttime adds to the complexity. So, remember **CALL or TEXT 911** ASAP for your sake and ours.

Other useful information can be found at:

<http://cpw.state.co.us/learn/Pages/HuntingTipsNon-Residents.aspx>

<http://www.thecoloradohunter.com/colorado-hunting-tips>



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