



# Medical Self-Assessment

## Signs and Symptoms of Altitude Decompression Sickness (DCS)

### BENDS

*Mostly large joints of the body (elbows, shoulders, hip, wrists, knees, ankles)*

- Localized deep pain, ranging from mild (a “niggle”) to excruciating; Sometimes a dull ache, but rarely a sharp pain
- Active and passive motion of the joint aggravates the pain
- Pain can occur at altitude, during the descent, or many hours later

### NEUROLOGIC Manifestations

#### *Brain*

- Confusion or memory loss
- Headache
- Spots in visual field (scotoma), tunnel vision, double vision (diplopia), or blurry vision
- Unexplained extreme fatigue or behavior changes
- Seizures, dizziness, vertigo, nausea, vomiting, and unconsciousness may occur

#### *Spinal Cord*

- Abnormal sensations such as burning, stinging, and tingling around the lower chest and back
- Symptoms may spread from the feet up and may be accompanied by ascending weakness or paralysis
- Girdling abdominal or chest pain
- *Peripheral Nerves*
- Urinary and rectal incontinence
- Abnormal sensations, such as numbness, burning, stinging, and tingling (paresthesia)
- Muscle weakness or twitching

### CHOKES

#### *Lungs*

- Burning deep chest pain (under the sternum)
- Pain is aggravated by breathing
- Shortness of breath (dyspnea)
- Dry constant cough



## SKIN BENDS

### *Skin*

- Itching usually around the ears, face, neck, arms, and upper torso
- Sensation of tiny insects crawling over the skin
- Mottled or marbled skin usually around the shoulders, upper chest and abdomen, accompanied by itching
- Swelling of the skin, accompanied by tiny scar-like skin depressions (pitting edema)

Source: Federal Aviation Administration: Altitude-induced Decompression Sickness

<https://www.faa.gov/pilots/safety/pilotsafetybrochures/media/DCS.pdf>

