**Plunge into Safe Practices: Tips to Keep in Mind when Diving**

It’s extremely tempting to dive while on a cruise or even on a stopover in places like Australia, the Caribbean or South America. That clear blue water and colorful aquatic life is inviting. But diving exposes your body to stressful conditions and you need to be physically and mentally fit in order to withstand them.

“One of the most dangerous elements of diving is the pressure change,” says Robert Quigley, MD, Regional Medical Director, Americas, for International SOS. “When you increase the pressure surrounding your body, the gases in your body undergo changes that have an effect on all of the cavities that contain air.”

Changes in pressure will also change the quantity of gases dissolved in your blood stream and body tissues, which can cause serious health risks.

**Here are some other issues that may arise:**

* **Decompression sickness**

Decompression sickness occurs when a diver surfaces too quickly. The increase in pressure caused by diving raises the gases present in the blood stream and tissues, and if this extra gas is not breathed out in time, it causes gas bubbles to form in these areas. The gas bubbles often cause extreme pain. “The bends” is the familiar term for this condition.

Decompression sickness can damage tissues and block blood flow to the brain. In some cases, it can be fatal. Treatment involves a hyperbaric chamber. The patient is placed inside the chamber and the pressure is increased, causing the gas bubbles throughout the body to dissolve. The chamber’s pressure is then slowly lowered. This treatment may be repeated to ensure a healthy recovery.

* **Barotrauma**

Barotrauma can occur when the body’s organs are subjected to excessive pressure. This often affects the ears and sinuses, resulting in pain in these areas during descent. If this occurs, the diver should consider ending the dive.

Vertigo is another, more serious symptom of barotrauma. This spinning feeling is dangerous when experienced underwater, because it can easily lead to disorientation.

Barotrauma can damage the lungs, which can cause an *arterial gas embolism*, occurring during ascent from the dive. Essentially, the gas in the lungs expands too fast and tears the lung tissue. Huge air bubbles leak from the lungs into the blood stream, and these can block circulation to important areas such as the brain or legs.

* **Hypothermia**

Hypothermia is a reduced temperature in the core of the body. It can result from diving, especially in colder waters. Wear a quality and effective wetsuit, especially in colder waters, to avoid hypothermia.

**Prevention**

“If you decide to dive, there are steps you can take to stay safe,” says Dr. Quigley. “First and foremost, know what you are doing and take a quality diving class and a medical exam.”

If you have questions or experience a medical issue on a trip, whether for business or pleasure, call [International SOS](http://internationalsos.com/en/) and speak with a physician or nurse.

More information and tips are available at [www.internationalsos.com](http://www.internationalsos.com). Simply insert our membership number (XXXXXXXX) or visit our Intranet site at (insert link).

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