

# Anemia

Although there are many types of anemia, advice to the traveler is similar for all. In general, special consideration should be given to anyone with a hemoglobin below  $8.5 \text{ g} \cdot \text{dl}^{-1}$  because at such low levels, passengers may experience lightheadedness or even lose consciousness during flight, particularly with physical exertion such as going to the lavatory. Although this is the recommended standard for air travel, there may be individual variability depending upon how well compensated the anemia is. For example, a passenger with chronic renal failure may tolerate a lower hemoglobin level at cabin cruising altitude better than someone with a recent hemorrhage. If there is any question about suitability to fly, medical oxygen should be administered.

A particularly severe form of anemia is sickle cell disease, which may be exacerbated by reduced oxygen pressures. Because such a crisis could be life-threatening, such patients should be advised not to travel by air without medical oxygen. Sickle cell trait, on the other hand, has not been associated with problems at normal cruising altitude.