

# Study: High altitude living-depression linked

By Kristen Moulton, Salt Lake Tribune

The loss of oxygen from living at high altitudes or with chronic health issues can lead to depression.

A study from the University of Utah found that female rats living for a week at simulated high altitudes of 10,000 feet, 20,000 feet and 4,500 feet showed signs of depression. Lake Tahoe is at 6,250 feet. Male rats showed no ill effects.

“The significance of this animal study is that it can isolate hypoxia as a distinct risk factor for depression in those living at altitude (hypobaric hypoxia) or with other chronic hypoxic conditions such as COPD, asthma or smoking, independent of other risk factors,” said Shami Kanekar, a research assistant professor of psychiatry at the university and lead author of the report.

In the study published last month in High Altitude Medicine and Biology online, researchers gauged the animals’ depression based on their persistence during a swim test.

Because rats do not respond to the same psychological and societal pressures as people, the research strengthens the argument that physiological changes from low oxygen can contribute to depression.

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