

SOMEONE'S GOT TO DO IT...

ALTITUDE TRAINER

Richard Pullan, 33, is the founder and director of the Altitude Centre in London. He lives in Brixton.

Your mission is to make people more efficient with the air they breathe. Why?

You can live three weeks without food, three days without water but only three minutes without air, so it's very important. I see three main groups of people. First, sports people – all world-champion athletes in distance events do altitude training. Second, those who come to me for health reasons, such as people with asthma or chronic fatigue. Finally, mountain climbers and high-altitude trekkers. I've seen Bear Grylls, who is planning to fly over Everest in a para-glider, and a team from the British Army that was climbing Everest. But also normal people on a Saga trip to Peru.

What do you do to these people?

We create an environment to simulate altitudes up to 22,000ft or 6,500m – higher than Mount Kilimanjaro. People come to our place in Covent Garden and, for an hour a day for three weeks, they breathe less oxygen. It acclimatises them before they go and reduces their chances of getting altitude sickness – so they can enjoy the view without vomiting or keeling over.

Does it really cure altitude sickness?

It really lessens the sickness, so the symptoms are much milder.

Why are you offering them this service?

I had a job in advertising but gave it up several times for sport. I went to New Zealand to row one season and discovered simulated altitude training there. My recovery after training was a lot better after doing it and I felt fresher and less tired. I rowed across the Atlantic to think about it. The altitude training definitely helped me with that, so when I returned I set this up.

Isn't it quite dull, measuring people's heartbeats all day long?

No, I love this job. The people I see are really motivated. They are facing probably the biggest challenge of their life – walking to the South Pole, climbing Everest, or free-diving in the Arctic Circle – and I can make a difference.

Are the clients happy?

The training is very relaxing, they can switch off and just concentrate on breathing. But I also often get feedback – the letters and photos from the summit – and that's what really makes it for me. **CANDIDA CREWE**