

# Dehydration

## What is dehydration?

Dehydration is a loss of too much fluid from the body. Your child's body is about two-thirds water and needs the water to work well. Children may get dehydrated if they lose much more fluid than they are getting from food and drinks. In severe cases, a child may get very sick and die.

Your child normally loses fluids through sweating, urination and breathing.

Along with the fluids, the body loses electrolytes, which are minerals such as sodium and potassium. The body needs these minerals to keep working normally.

## What is the cause?

The most common causes of dehydration are:

- Urinating more than normal because of infection
- Vomiting or having diarrhea
- Sweating more than usual
- Breathing faster than usual
- Fever
- Having a disease, such as diabetes
- Being unable to eat or drink or not having access to drinking water
- Skin injuries, such as burns or skin disease
- Taking certain medicines, such as diuretics (medicines that help the body get rid of extra fluid)

Although anyone can become dehydrated, people most at risk are:

- Babies less than 1 year old
- Older adults
- Anyone who has a fever
- People in hot weather
- People doing strenuous work or activity, especially in the heat
- People with diabetes if they are urinating a lot because their blood sugar is too high

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of early or mild dehydration include:

- Thirst
- Flushed face
- Dry, warm skin
- A lack of energy, weak or dizzy
- Dark yellow urine

Babies may:

- Be slightly more fussy
- Be less active than usual

As dehydration gets worse, symptoms include:

- Dry mouth and tongue with thick saliva
- Dry skin that has lost its elasticity (stretchiness)
- Sunken eyes with few or no tears
- Small amounts of dark yellow urine or no urine
- Cramping or severe muscle spasms in the arms, legs, stomach, and back
- Headache, lightheadedness, and fainting
- Weakness and confusion
- Seizures
- Fast and deep breathing

## **How is it diagnosed?**

Your child's healthcare provider will ask about your child's symptoms and medical history and examine your child. Your child may have blood and urine tests.

## **How is it treated?**

Early or mild dehydration can usually be treated at home.

Severe dehydration requires immediate medical care. It is treated in the hospital with IV fluids. Your child will also be treated for whatever is causing the dehydration, such as diarrhea or vomiting.

## **How can I take care of my child?**

Your child needs to drink enough liquid to replace the fluids and minerals he has lost. Try to get your child to drink extra fluids. One way to tell if your child is drinking enough liquid is to look at the color of your child's urine. It should be very light yellow.

### **Babies under 1 year old**

If you are not breast-feeding, give your child an oral rehydration solution (ORS) such as Pedialyte. An ORS is a mixture of fluids, minerals, sugar, and salts that replaces fluid lost by vomiting or diarrhea. You can buy these products at drug and grocery stores. Give the ORS instead of formula for the first 12 to 24 hours. Start giving formula again after your baby has gone 12 to 24 hours without vomiting.

If you are breast-feeding and your baby is urinating less often than normal, offer an ORS between breast-feedings for the first 6 to 24 hours. If your child is vomiting, give small amounts of breast milk or the ORS more often than you usually feed. It will be easier for your child to keep small amounts of liquid down.

## **Children over 1 year old**

Give an ORS such as Pedialyte to start. You can also try giving your child water, ice chips, or Popsicles. If you don't have an ORS, you can give your child clear broth or water mixed with fruit juice. These are easy for your child's body to absorb. Avoid concentrated fruit juices, sodas, milk, and milk products. They are not as easily absorbed and usually have too much sugar.

If your child is vomiting, he or she should drink small amounts of liquid often rather than a lot all at once. Start with 1 teaspoon to 1 tablespoon every 5 minutes and increase gradually.

If your child is exercising a lot, especially in hot weather, he needs to drink water before, during, and after exercise. To prevent overheating, you may want to use an air conditioner or fan in hot weather.

If your child has diabetes, it is important to keep your child's blood sugar under control.

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