

Dehydration

WHAT IS DEHYDRATION?

Dehydration is the loss of too much fluid from the body. Your child's body is about two-thirds water and needs this fluid to survive. Children may get dehydrated if they lose more fluid than they are getting from food and drinks. Your child normally loses fluids through sweating, urination, and breathing. Excessive fluid loss can be caused by:

- Diarrhea
- Vomiting

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. Early or mild dehydration can usually be treated at home to prevent severe dehydration, which requires urgent treatment with IV therapy.

OTHER CAUSES OF DEHYDRATION MAY INCLUDE:

- Urinating more than normal because of infection or diabetes
- Sweating more than usual
- Fever
- 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 one year old
- Older adults
- People with diabetes

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF DEHYDRATION?

- **Symptoms of early or mild dehydration include:**
 - Thirst
 - Flushed face
 - Dry, warm skin
 - A lack of energy or feeling weak or dizzy
 - Dark yellow urine
- **Babies may:**
 - Be slightly more fussy
 - Be less active than usual
 - Having fewer wet diapers than usual
- **As dehydration gets worse, symptoms include:**
 - Dry mouth and tongue with thick saliva
 - Dry skin that has lost its elasticity (stretchiness) so it will tent up if pinched
 - 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 DEHYDRATION TREATED?

Early or mild dehydration can usually be treated at home with a focus on fluid intake.

Severe dehydration requires immediate medical care to treat the cause and rehydrate with IV fluids.

TREATMENT ADVICE TO CARE FOR YOUR CHILD

Your child needs to drink enough liquid to replace the lost fluids and minerals. Try to get your child to drink extra liquids. One way to tell if your child is drinking enough liquid is to look at your child's urine. Urine should be clear to very light yellow. Darker urine colour means more fluid is required.

Babies under one year old

If you are not breast-feeding, give your child an oral rehydration drink such as Pedialyte. An oral

rehydration solution 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. There are several brands and even no-name versions available. Give the oral rehydration solution drink instead of formula until your baby has at least four hours without vomiting.

Under six months of age, the goal is usually to provide 30 to 90 mL (one to three ounces) oral rehydration solution every hour for four hours. At age six months to two years, provide 180 to 250 mL (six to eight ounces) of clear fluid every hour for the first four hours. If vomiting, provide half that amount and increase to the goal after four hours without vomiting. Follow the label directions on the product you purchase.

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

Children over one year old

Give clear fluids such as water, ice chips, apple juice diluted with half water, or popsicles and start an oral rehydration solution such as Pedialyte as soon as you can. 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, your child should drink frequent small amounts of liquid often rather than a lot all at once. Start with one teaspoon to one tablespoon every five minutes and increase gradually. They may be thirsty and want to drink more, but slow sips are best to keep it down. Even if vomiting continues, some fluid will be absorbed in the stomach.

If your child is exercising a lot, especially in hot weather, your child 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, and have regular rests in shade or a cooler place.

If your child has diabetes, it is important to keep your child's blood glucose (sugar) under control and ensure they are drinking water often.

WHEN SHOULD I SEE A HEALTH-CARE PROVIDER?

SEE A HEALTH-CARE PROVIDER IMMEDIATELY if:

- Your child shows signs of dehydration after following the treatment advice (such as no urine for over 8 hours or over 12 hours if more than one year old, very dry mouth, no tears when crying).
- Your child is vomiting repeatedly with clear fluids AND also has watery diarrhea.
- Your child is confused or difficult to awaken.
- Your child starts acting very sick (unable to sit up or walk, not moving limbs, not awake and alert or able to speak, not taking any fluids).

SEE A HEALTH-CARE PROVIDER TODAY if:

- Your child is feeling ill and is reluctant to drink
- Vomiting everything continues 4 hours after the start of clear fluids

If you haven't spoken to us yet, call Health Links – Info Santé to discuss your child's symptoms with a nurse. Call back any time if your condition changes and you need assessment, or you have any questions or concerns.

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Reviewed and Revised by Health Links - Info Santé of the Provincial Health Contact Centre, April, 2018

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