

## What is dehydration?

- It is normal for the body to lose some water every day.
- The body loses water through urine, tears, sweat, and stools.
- Dehydration is when the body loses too much water.
- Dehydration is a serious condition in infants and young children. The younger a child is, the more serious dehydration is.

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## What causes it?

- Dehydration is the result of the body losing too much water.
- Dehydration can be caused by fever, diarrhea, vomiting, or exercise.

## Who can get it?

- You should watch for signs of dehydration if your child has a fever, is vomiting, has diarrhea, or is exercising.
- Younger children are more easily dehydrated than older children and teens.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

- Dry mouth
- Few tears or no tears when crying
- Fussy behavior in infants
- Fewer than 6 wet diapers per day
- 4 to 6 hours without a wet diaper if a child is under 6 months old
- No urination for 6 to 8 hours in children
- Soft spot on an infant's head is sunken in or flatter than usual
- Dry, wrinkled skin (especially on the stomach, arms, and legs)
- Weakness, appears limp
- Sunken eyes
- Sleepiness, confused
- Muscle cramps
- Fast pulse or weak pulse
- Gray skin

## How is it treated?

- Call your doctor right away if you notice signs of dehydration.
- If your child is dehydrated, it is important to replace lost body fluids right away.
- Take steps to treat vomiting and diarrhea.
- Dehydration should be treated according to your child's age.

### Infants under 6 months

- Give your child frequent, small amounts of an oral rehydration solution, such as Pedialyte. These can be bought at the store.
- Try 1 tablespoon every 15 to 20 minutes.
- Your infant can still take breast milk in small amounts (only every 1 to 2 hours).

### Infants 6 months to a year old

- Give your child frequent, small amounts of an oral rehydration solution, such as Pedialyte. These can be bought at the store.
- Give 1/2 ounce every 15 to 20 minutes.
- Slowly increase the amount.

### **Children 1 year old or older**

- Offer frequent, small amounts of clear fluids. Use an oral rehydration solution (such as Pedialyte) if possible.
  - Some doctors also suggest giving clear fluids such as water, ice chips, sports drinks (such as Gatorade), clear sodas with no bubbles (such as ginger ale), and popsicles.
  - Do not give plain water.
  - Avoid fruit juices, gelatin desserts (such as Jell-O), and sugary drinks (such as Kool Aid or soda pop).
  - Offer 1/2 ounce of clear fluids every 5 to 10 minutes.
  - Avoid milk and milk products.
- If your child is not vomiting, you can give her bland food while treating dehydration.
  - Do not keep your child on a clear liquid diet for more than 24 hours. Talk to your doctor.
  - Do not give plain water to a child with dehydration, vomiting, or diarrhea.
  - Do not add salt to fluids.
  - Avoid giving sugary fruit juices and drinks (such as Kool Aid or soda pop) to a child who is dehydrated.

### **Can it be prevented?**

- Take steps to prevent dehydration if your child has vomiting and diarrhea.
- Encourage your child to drink plenty of fluids before, during, and after physical activity.

### **When should I call the doctor?**

- Take your child to the emergency room if she shows signs of severe dehydration.
- Call your doctor right away if your child shows signs of dehydration.
- Call the doctor if you have questions or concerns about your child's treatment or condition.

### **Quick Answers**

- Dehydration is when the body loses too much water.
- Dehydration is often caused by fever, diarrhea, vomiting, or exercise.
- Dehydration is a serious condition in infants and young children.
- Signs of dehydration include dry mouth, no tears when crying, few wet diapers or very little urination, and weakness.
- If your child is dehydrated, call the doctor. Give frequent, small amounts of clear liquid. Oral rehydration solution (such as Pedialyte) is best. Do not use plain water.
- Take steps to prevent dehydration if your child has vomiting or diarrhea.
- Take your child to the emergency room if she shows signs of severe dehydration.

### **References**

- Caring for Kids. Dehydration and Diarrhea. <http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/> 1999 (cited 2002 May 7).
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