

# Dehydration



Dehydration occurs when you don't have enough water in your body to maintain a healthy balance of salts and sugars (minerals). This imbalance in your system dramatically affects the way the body functions. Every day we lose water through normal processes including respiration, urination, crying, spitting and sweating. Typically we replenish what we lose by drinking more water, or by eating certain foods with a high water content. Sometimes we don't successfully replenish what's lost, and then we can become dehydrated. This can be a serious problem, especially for children.

## What causes dehydration?



There are a number of reasons a child might become dehydrated. They may forget to drink enough fluids throughout the day, they may have a fever or diarrhea, they may be playing and sweating profusely, or they might just have a sore throat and drinking is uncomfortable so they avoid it entirely.

## Symptoms of dehydration may include:



- Feeling thirsty, or having a dry or sticky mouth
- Sunken eyes, or crying with few or no tears
- In infants, soft spot (fontanelle) on top of the head may look sunken
- Infrequent urination or fewer wet diapers than usual
- Unusual fussiness or crankiness
- Unusual sleepiness or dizziness



## How can you help your child?

If your child is diagnosed with dehydration and your doctor advises it's safe to treat them at home, here are a few things you can do:

- Give them small frequent sips of a rehydration solution every few minutes (e.g. 5-10 millilitres of Gastrolyte, HYDRALyte, Pedialyte and Replatyte or other glucose-salt solutions). Children can also have diluted apple juice or regular milk. Older children may also have electrolyte ice pops;
- Avoid giving sugary drinks (sodas, sports drinks or undiluted fruit juice) as this can make dehydration worse; do not give infants water as this does not have the required mineral balance to hydrate them;
- Maintain the child's regular diet unless otherwise instructed by your doctor; do not give medicine for vomiting or diarrhea, unless instructed by your doctor;
- Reduce the amount of the hydration solution once the child begins to feel better and starts to return to their normal eating habits.

## When should you call a doctor?

Call the doctor if your child:

- Refuses to drink for more than a few hours;
- Is under 12 months and drinking only a rehydration solution for 24 hours;
- Vomits more than a few times within 24 hours, or has vomit that's green, red or brown;
- Continues to refuse food for 3 days;
- Has any of the signs of dehydration;
- Has skin that appears dry and wrinkled;
- Exhibits labored, rapid breathing;
- Has cool hands and feet with blotchy skin.

## How can you prevent dehydration?

If your child is physically active, particularly outside during hot weather, be sure to give them extra fluids in advance and have them take regular breaks to drink fluids during activity. When your child is sick, give them small amounts of extra fluid on a frequent basis. This is especially important if they are experiencing nausea and vomiting.