

# Dehydration

## Care Provider Bulletin

August 2018



### What is dehydration?

- Dehydration occurs when fluids and electrolytes are lost due to profuse sweating and not drinking enough water.
- Various organs are affected. The person will feel ill and could become incapacitated.
- It can be difficult to detect mild to moderate dehydration.

### Who is at risk?

- People who cannot recognize symptoms of dehydration.
- People who take psychotropic medications. Those medications may decrease the body's ability to sweat. Certain medications such as lithium need water in the body to do their job; if there is not enough water the person may develop lithium toxicity, which can be life threatening. Other medications decrease certain brain functions such as temperature control, and the person becomes prone to overheating or heat loss.
- People with a long-term health condition such as diabetes.
- Infants.
- Older people.
- Athletes.

### When is the risk higher?

- In hot weather
- During exercise
- During sickness
- Limited access to fluids



### Prevent dehydration

- Offer water frequently
- Consider ways to make drinking water more palatable such as a pitcher of ice water with lemon or other fruits
- Monitor fluid intake and output – consider tracking this information
- Encourage other types of fluids if water is not preferred
- Watch for signs of dehydration (see next page)

### Did you know?

- Individuals who rely on care from others may not recognize they need fluids. It is important for care providers to offer fluids frequently and watch for signs of dehydration.
- Water helps the body in many different ways. It regulates temperature, lubricates joints, and removes waste from the body.
- Plain water is the best but other beverages and foods high in water can also help with hydration. It is important to act quickly if someone is dehydrated, as the result can be serious and even life threatening. It is safer to have a person drink extra water now than to wait until they are in need of IV fluids.
- Medications or illness may cause dehydration. Hydration is important for someone losing fluids through diarrhea, vomiting, or a fever.

## Signs of dehydration

- Heat exhaustion
- Headaches
- Fainting
- Blurred vision
- Mood change
- Urine output decreases and becomes concentrated, appears dark
- Sunken eyes
- Wrinkled or saggy skin – elasticity decreases (pinch skin and it stays folded)
- Extreme dryness in the mouth
- Fever over 102 degrees
- Constipation
- Severe pain or blistering of skin
- Increased thirst
- Fatigue
- No tears when crying
- Dizziness

## Signs of severe dehydration

- Nausea and/or vomiting
- Confusion
- Seizures
- Rapid breathing
- Coma
- Low blood pressure
- Diarrhea
- Irregular heartbeat

## When dehydration occurs

- Offer plenty of fluids. Depending on symptoms, smaller sips may be easier to tolerate.
- If you think someone is dehydrated, seek medical attention right away, especially for these symptoms:
  - No urine for eight hours
  - Rapid heartbeat
  - Dizziness
  - Confusion

## Staying hydrated

- Offer foods that contain a lot of water - popsicles, watermelon, cantaloupe, fruit salads, gelatin, cucumbers, lettuce, celery, tomatoes, and strawberries.
- If you are thirsty and drinking a beverage, it is a good reminder to offer one to the person you are supporting as well.
- Encourage the person to carry a water bottle and remind them to take drinks, or keep one for them and offer drinks frequently.
- When going out - bring water for everyone in the group.
- Encourage water over, or in addition to, soda or other sweetened beverages.

**If you suspect dehydration, rehydration is the key to preventing further complications.**

**Remember to offer fluids!**



## Sources & Resources:

- **Video: What happens if you do not drink enough water – Signs of Dehydration + 4 ways to keep hydrated (5:50)**
- **Water & Nutrition, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**, [www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/nutrition/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/nutrition/index.html)
- **Benefits of Water: Are you getting enough fluids to stay healthy, CNN**, [www.cnn.com/2017/09/27/health/benefits-of-water-and-fluids/index.html](http://www.cnn.com/2017/09/27/health/benefits-of-water-and-fluids/index.html)
- **The Fatal Four: Exactly How Dangerous is Dehydration, RELIAS**, [www.relias.com/blog/the-fatal-four-how-dangerous-is-dehydration](http://www.relias.com/blog/the-fatal-four-how-dangerous-is-dehydration)