



Dehydration

MU Patient Education Series

Definition:

Dehydration occurs when your body loses more fluid than you take in, inhibiting your body from carrying out its normal functions. Dehydration can be extremely harmful, so it is critical that you drink enough fluids and try to stay hydrated at all times.

CAUSES:

Some common causes of dehydration include:

- Not drinking enough water
- Frequent urination
- Excessive sweating
- Vomiting
- Fever
- Heat
- Increased physical activity without hydrating
- Diarrhea
- Heat stroke

SIGNS/SYMPTOMS:

When you are dehydrated, your body lacks essential fluids required to function. When your body cannot perform its normal functions, you will begin to experience any number of the following symptoms:

- Nausea
- Dry mouth
- Thirst
- Constipation
- Headache
- Dry skin



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- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Hallucinations
- Paleness
- Discoloration of urine - Dark yellow or amber color urine usually signals dehydration
- Decreased, infrequent or no urination
- Lack of sweating
- Rapid heartbeat
- Fainting
- Fever
- Exhaustion
- Lightheadedness

PREVENTION:

Drink lots of water and try to eat foods with high water content such as fruits and vegetables. Pay special attention to your thirst when you are sick, when it is hot outside and while you are exercising. Begin giving fluids early in the course of an illness instead of waiting until the situation becomes urgent.

TREATMENT/CARE:

The only cure for dehydration is to replace your lost fluids and consume electrolytes. You can do this by drinking water and other liquids such as Gatorade® and sports drinks. When rehydrating your body, it is essential that you do not drink too fast. Slowly sip cool water. Also, try to avoid ice cold water. In order to make yourself more comfortable, you can lie down with a cool, wet towel on your forehead. The best approach to dehydration treatment depends on age, the severity of dehydration and its cause.

CALL YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER IF:

If you do not stay hydrated, complications may arise. If your dehydration does not improve after drinking more fluids or you are experiencing vomiting, fainting or a high fever call your physician immediately. If your doctor determines that you are severely dehydrated, you may require intravenous fluids. Get immediate medical care if you develop severe signs and symptoms such as extreme thirst, a lack of urination, shriveled skin, dizziness and confusion.

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