

Dehydration

Dehydration means your body does not have enough water or fluids. If you are dehydrated, it is important to quickly take in additional fluids. It is also important to **prevent** dehydration whenever possible.

A Word of Caution

Dehydration can be serious and require immediate medical attention.

Call your doctor if:

- You are unable to urinate.
- Your heart rate is faster than usual.
- You feel confused or experience changes in how you think.
- You are dizzy or light-headed when standing up.

Causes of Dehydration

Dehydration is caused when you do not take in enough fluids to replace fluids lost through bodily functions like urination, bowel movements, and sweating.

- A sore mouth or throat, nausea, or a poor appetite may keep you from drinking enough fluids.
- Vomiting, diarrhea, fever, and/or excessive sweating can cause above-normal fluid losses.

- You may also become dehydrated if you urinate more than usual because of uncontrolled diabetes or use of water pills.
- Fluid loss can be made worse by some medications, caffeine, and alcohol.

Symptoms

Symptoms of dehydration may include:

- Thirst
- Dry mouth and tongue
- Dry and cracked lips and skin
- Dark-colored urine
- Headache
- Voiding frequent, small amounts of urine
- Constipation (hard, small stools)
- A heart rate that is faster than your usual heart rate
- Confusion or change in thinking
- Dizziness or light-headedness when standing up

However, you can be dehydrated before you notice symptoms. Also, if you are not feeling well, it may be hard to know whether your symptoms are caused by dehydration or by something else.

To be safe, always try to get enough fluids to prevent dehydration.

Tips to Prevent Dehydration

- Drink small amounts of fluids as often as you can tolerate them. Watch the clock and plan to drink at least a cup of fluid every 1 to 2 hours. Each day you should drink a total of about 8 to 12 cups of liquids a day. (Drink more if you have diarrhea or are vomiting.)
- Ask family and friends to encourage or remind you to drink more fluids.
- Keep a water bottle with you during the day to sip on.
- Keep a glass of water beside your bed to sip on at night.
- Drink liquids with meals.
- In addition to plain water, also drink fruit juices, soft drinks, flavored waters, decaffeinated coffee and tea, sport drinks, milk, and other beverages.
- Eat foods that are high in fluids, like bouillon, broth-based soups, gelatin, fruit ices, popsicles, sherbet, milkshakes, and medical nutritional supplement drinks.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages.
- Limit drinks with caffeine to two a day.