

Spotting the signs of dehydration

A guide for carers of children
and young people



What is dehydration?

Water makes up more than half of a child's body. It is vital children drink enough fluid to maintain a healthy balance. Children become dehydrated by not drinking enough fluids or by losing fluids and not replacing them. If it isn't treated it can get worse and become a serious problem. Adults need to be a good role model by following this advice.

Who is at high risk?

A child may be at risk of dehydration if they:

- have a raised temperature
- have vomiting or diarrhoea
- have swallowing problems
- are not given access to fluids after exercise

Young children are reliant on care givers.

Good hydration can assist in preventing or treating:

- urinary tract infection
- headaches
- poor concentration
- dizziness
- constipation
- poor oral health
- low energy levels
- dry skin
- increased heart rate (affecting younger children and babies)

Spotting the signs and symptoms:

- drinking less than usual
- low energy levels
- feeling thirsty
- urinary tract infection
- dark coloured pee
- peeing less than 4 times per day or fewer wet nappies
- tiredness
- dry mouth/lips
- fewer or no tears
- cold or dry skin
- decrease in concentration
- poor oral health
- sunken eyes or sunken soft spot on the head (for babies)

What should children drink?

Aim for six to eight cups or mugs per day. The amount per cup depends on the age of the child.

- under 5 years 120-150ml cup
- 6 years and above 250-300ml cup

Fluids could include milk, water and sugar free diluting juice. Water can also be flavoured with mint leaves, ginger or frozen fruit, however plain water is best.

In addition some foods are a good source of fluid; water rich fruits such as melons, soup ice lollies, jelly, yoghurt or milk puddings.

The key is to offer drinks regularly throughout the day.

What to do if you are concerned about a child

You can help prevent a child from becoming dehydrated by:

- recognise the early warning signs
- encourage around six to eight drinks (vary size according to age) per day, eg. offer a drink at meals and also between times with a snack
- offer foods that are a good source of fluid; water rich fruits such as melons, soup ice lollies, jelly, yoghurt or milk puddings.

Who can help?

Your GP or health visitor can provide you with advice or information about preventing dehydration in children.



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