



# Dehydration

Dehydration is when a person's body does not have enough fluids. Your body needs water to work properly. To keep enough fluid in your body cells, your cells 'drink' fluid from your blood. Your blood needs fluid to keep it moving around your body and organs.

## Causes of Dehydration

You can get dehydrated if you:

- + Do not drink enough water.
- + Stop drinking liquids.
- + Lose a lot of fluids from:
  - Sweating a lot (like from a fever).
  - Doing heavy exercise.
  - Vomiting.
  - Diarrhea.
  - Urinating often.

## Symptoms

The first sign of being dehydrated is being thirsty. Sometimes, people do not notice they are thirsty. Other people may notice they are thirsty, but they drink fluids like coffee, tea, or alcohol. These fluids cause you to get more dehydrated.

- + **Signs of becoming dehydrated:**
  - Thirst.
  - Dry mouth.
  - Headache.
  - Feeling tired and jittery.
  - Cramping in your muscles, especially in your legs.
  - Urine is darker than usual.
  - Dizziness when you stand up or sit up.

- + **Signs that dehydration is getting worse:**
  - Your mouth and eyes are really dry.
  - You feel dizzy, lightheaded or like you are going to faint.
  - You are not able to think clearly.
- + You pee (urinate) very little or do not go pee for 8 hours or more.

## HOW TO CARE FOR YOURSELF AT HOME

You need to keep yourself hydrated. Here are a few things you can do:

- + **Drink liquids** such as water, ginger ale, or sports drinks. Take small sips often. Do not drink a whole glass at once. Try drinking liquids that are at room temperature or warm. This can help an upset stomach.
- + **Take medicines with water.**
- + **DO NOT** drink anything that has caffeine in it. Examples of caffeine drinks are coffee, tea, colas, and energy drinks. These cause you to go pee more often.
- + **DO NOT** drink alcohol, including beer and wine. These also cause dehydration.

## How to prevent dehydration in the future

Here are a few things that you can do to stop getting dehydrated:

- + Drink four to eight glasses of water each day.
- + Drink water before, during and after exercise or heavy work.
- + Drink small sips of water often when you are not feeling well.
- + If you do drink fluids with caffeine or alcohol, make sure to drink equal amounts of water.

## WHEN TO GET HELP

### Go to the nearest Emergency Department

if you are experiencing any of the following:

- + You are not acting like yourself.
- + Your heart beat is very fast (more than 120 beats per minute).
- + You are not responding to others.
- + You are very pale or have blue lips or earlobes.
- + You have fainted.
- + You feel lightheaded or dizzy and it does not go away when you lie down.
- + You feel like you are going to faint, or you have fainted.
- + You feel restless or confused.
- + Your breathing is fast and shallow.
- + Your skin is cool and damp to the touch. Maybe you are sweating a lot.
- + You feel very weak and shaky.
- + You are very thirsty, and your mouth and eyes are very dry.
- + You feel very sick to your stomach, or can not stop throwing up.

You may need to stay in the hospital and get fluids through an intravenous ('intra' meaning 'into' and 'venous' meaning 'vein' or into a vein, commonly called an IV).

**See your family doctor** if you are experiencing any of the following:

- + You are having trouble drinking the water you need because you feel too sick.
- + Your headache gets worse.
- + You are not able to take your medicines because you feel too sick.
- + You do not feel better in a day.
- + You have any questions or concerns.

## TO LEARN MORE ASK

- + Your family doctor.
- + Your nurse practitioner.
- + Your pharmacist.
- + HealthLinkBC - call 8-1-1 (7-1-1 for deaf or hard of hearing) or go online to [www.HealthLinkBC.ca](http://www.HealthLinkBC.ca).

## RECOMMENDED FOLLOW UP

- Follow up with your primary care provider in \_\_\_\_ days.

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Find this information sheet on the BC Emergency Medicine Network website:

[www.bcemn.ca/clinical\\_resource/dehydration/](http://www.bcemn.ca/clinical_resource/dehydration/)