

Our bodies are almost 75% water – every cell, tissue and organ in the body needs water to function. Dehydration results in a lack of adequate body fluids for the body to carry out normal functions at an optimum level and is also the primary trigger of daytime fatigue. Few people go through life without being dehydrated at some time.

What are the symptoms of dehydration?

For healthy people under normal circumstances, thirst is a reliable mechanism to indicate the body's need for more fluid. The degree of dehydration is graded according to signs and symptoms that reflect the amount of fluid lost.

In the early stages of dehydration, there are no signs or symptoms. Early features are difficult to detect but may include dryness of mouth and thirst. As dehydration becomes worse, the signs and symptoms that may develop include increasing thirst, restless or irritable behaviour, dry mouth and nose, and sunken eyes.

Symptoms of moderate dehydration

- Flushed face
- Extreme thirst
- Dry, warm skin
- Inability to pass urine
- Dizziness (made worse when standing)
- Weakness
- Cramping in the arms and legs
- Headaches
- Dry mouth.

Symptoms of severe dehydration

- Low blood pressure
- Fainting
- Convulsions
- Severe cramping
- Lack of elasticity of the skin
- Bloating stomach
- Heart failure
- Rapid, deep breathing
- Fast, weak pulse.



Preventing dehydration

Careful attention to adequate intake of fluids and electrolytes is important in preventing dehydration. Thirst is a good guide to when fluids need to be replaced, and water is generally the best choice. Caffeinated and alcoholic beverages can actually make dehydration worse, as they increase urine output.



Tips for preventing dehydration

- Always drink plenty of fluids during the day, especially when working or exercising in the sun.
- Make sure you are sufficiently hydrated before, during and after exercise. During exercise, it's recommended you replenish fluids at least every 20 minutes.
- Try to schedule all physical outdoor activities for cooler parts of the day.
- Flavour chilled water with lemon juice or mint leaves.
- Serve water at the table with meals, and try attractive containers and glasses – they may encourage children to drink more.
- Carry a bottle of water with you wherever you go. Get a lap belt with a water carrier if you go running, walking or biking.
- Establish habits – drink a glass of water before each meal, a glass on rising and another last thing before you go to bed. That's five glasses already!

Source: This article is reproduced and adapted with permission from Kidney Health New Zealand. For more health information please visit www.kidneys.co.nz

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