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The first sign of dehydration

Dehydration or hypohydration occurs when a loss of fluids exceeds fluid intake. Even a minor change in fluid concentrations can result in dehydration. It is, therefore, necessary to drink water as you lose it. When dehydrated, the human body does not function at its best and may be at risk for life-threatening diseases. Anyone can become dehydrated, but older people and young children are most susceptible. 1. Bad Breath Your breath may be telling you that your body is running low on water. Saliva has antibacterial properties, but lack of hydration can deter your body from producing enough of it. With insufficient saliva in the mouth, bacterial overgrowth is possible, and as a side effect, smelly breath. Often, dehydration is the cause of bad breath. Dehydration happens when there is a significant lack of water in the body. This is usually due to drinking too little water or excessive sweating without replenishing fluids. Most people will experience this water shortage at some point in their lives. Symptoms of dehydration can range from mild and fleeting to serious and long-lasting. There is no group of people that are not susceptible to dehydration, but the condition can affect infants and older people more severely than healthy individuals of other ages. In the case of infants, dehydration is generally caused by severe diarrhea and/or vomiting. Older people simply maintain a lower level of water in their body naturally. However, they are more likely to be on daily medications, many of which increase the chances of dehydration. That said, anyone exerting themselves in the hot sun or warmer temperatures needs to ensure that they are taking in enough fluids. Except in extreme cases, dehydration can be prevented simply by increasing consumption of water. Exertion in warmer climates leads to sweating and increases the risk of dehydration. But excessive exercise isn't the only potential cause of dehydration. If you're running a fever, there is a good chance you'll also be sweating, which can lead to unexpected dehydration. In the case of infants and young children, parents should watch for signs of dehydration such as tearless crying, dry mouth, dry diapers for 3-4 hours, listless behavior, sunken soft spots on the top of the skull, and sunken cheeks. Adults might first notice dehydration when urination is less frequent or dark in color. They may also experience headaches, dizziness, fatigue and constant thirst. Common SymptomsInfrequent UrinationDark-Colored UrineDry MouthConfusionFatigue Symptoms of dehydration occur due to the ratio of water being used against how much water individuals are taking in. When an individual sweats, they lose a lot of liquids as well as salt from their body. Rejuvenating the body with what they have lost is essential in avoiding dehydration. To avoid dehydration, experts say individuals should drink half of their body weight in ounces. For example, someone who weighs 140 pounds should consume seventy ounces of water each day. This recommendation can vary based on an individual's level of physical activity, however, as those who exercise more will need to drink more water. Of course, should individuals become dehydrated, it is crucial to recognize the warning signs so they can better treat the situation before there are complications. With this in mind, take a look at common symptoms of dehydration now.ThirstCareFeeling thirsty, while some may believe it is a normal thing to experience, is actually one of the first signs an individual is already dehydrated, not that they will soon become so. This feeling is the body sending the individual a message saying they are dehydrated. The severity of the feeling of thirst is a good gauge as to how dehydrated an individual is. With mild dehydration, the thirst will be subtle, while severe dehydration leaves an individual feeling extremely thirsty. Drinking water as soon as the feeling of thirst hits will help get rid of dehydration quickly. Other beverages, such as real juice and sports drinks, can also help mitigate thirst, but water remains the best choice.Decrease In UrinationDreamstimeWhen someone is dehydrated, another obvious warning sign is a decrease in urination. Simply put, they will not be peeing nearly as often as they would if they were well-hydrated. Babies wearing diapers will not need to be changed as often. In addition to this decrease in urination, dehydrated individuals will also notice their urine will be a darker yellow than normal. Well-hydrated individuals should have clear or light yellow urine. In fact, urine color is the best marker of hydration. Even though the recommendation stated previously about drinking half of one's body weight (seventy ounces for someone weighing 140 pounds) is a good starting point, individuals should drink enough water and other fluids for their urine to run pale yellow or clear, no matter what the actual amount is.HeadacheDreamstimeIndividuals can get headaches for countless reasons, so having a headache lone is not enough to determine dehydration is the cause. However, drinking water when dealing with a headache cannot hurt, so it is a good idea to do so anyway. Individuals have headaches when they are dehydrated because as the body loses water, the blood loses volume and the brain begins to shrink. The shrinking brain begins pulling back from the skull, which triggers the headache. Since the volume of an individual's blood drops when dehydrated, there is less blood, and therefore less oxygen, getting to their brain, this also causes the tell-tale headaches. Aside from the headaches, dehydration can also cause dizziness, foggy thoughts, and a lack of focus as the brain begins to scale back functions to save what water it has.Dry SkinDreamstimePatients with mild to moderate dehydration may notice their skin is drier than usual. If dehydration progresses to a severe stage, the skin could become extremely dry, and it may feel cool or clammy. Dry skin may appear wrinkled, and dehydration often causes a noticeable decrease in skin turgor. Turgor refers to the skin's ability to return to its normal position after it has been gently pinched. Dry skin and changes in skin turgor could develop with a five percent fluid loss, and they are particularly likely to occur in cases of a ten to fifteen percent fluid loss. Patients who notice dry skin should consider increasing their fluid intake. If dry skin occurs in conjunction with other symptoms of dehydration such as rapid breathing, an increased heart rate, or sunken eyes, patients should seek urgent medical attention.DizzinessChicagoSunTimesDizziness often develops in cases of mild to moderate dehydration. Patients might feel as though the room is spinning around them, and dizziness could increase the risk of falls. Dizziness typically occurs in conjunction with a mild headache. When dizziness occurs, patients should sit or lie down as soon as possible. Patients should continue sitting or lying down until the dizziness passes. It can help to drink a glass of cool water. If dizziness occurs suddenly and is accompanied by a severe headache, fainting, or confusion, emergency medical care should be obtained immediately. Patients who experience frequent dizziness may want to keep a symptom journal to track these episodes, and it is beneficial to track fluid intake as well.FatigueDreamstimePatients with mild dehydration could develop minor fatigue. If dehydration advances to a more serious stage, patients could become increasingly sleepy, and they may be very lethargic. Fatigue could compromise the patient's ability to perform daily tasks, and patients could sleep for longer than usual. Fatigue associated with dehydration typically occurs in conjunction with weakness, and it could be accompanied by muscle pain as well. Since fatigue may be a symptom of a serious condition, patients who notice persistent fatigue should see a doctor for an evaluation. The doctor will want to know when the patient first noticed fatigue and if anything makes it better or worse. They will also ask the patient about any headaches or dizziness. A physical examination will be performed to check the patient's heart rate and blood pressure, and the healthcare provider may check for cracked lips and other physical signs of dehydration too. Blood tests may be necessary to determine the underlying cause of the patient's fatigue.Dry MouthThingsHealthChildren and adults with all stages of dehydration could experience a dry mouth. The mouth may feel scratchy and sore, and the patient might have cracked lips too. Grooves could form on the tongue, and the patient's saliva may be thick and stringy. It is common for patients with a dry mouth to have a sticky sensation in their mouth. Some individuals with a dry mouth also notice changes in taste and dryness in the nasal passages. A dry mouth can create difficulties with speaking, chewing, and swallowing, and it could cause dentures to fit improperly. Bad breath may develop, and the patient could notice a sore throat or hoarse voice. To investigate the underlying cause of a dry mouth, doctors begin with a visual examination of the lips and the inside of the mouth. If dehydration is suspected, the patient may need to have blood and urine tests. To ease the discomfort of a dry mouth, patients are often advised to drink more fluids.Individuals with mild to moderate dehydration may be able to ease dry mouth symptoms and rehydrate themselves by drinking fluids or by using oral rehydration solutions. Severely dehydrated individuals will often need to receive intravenous fluids at the hospital. Most patients find their dry mouth symptoms resolve completely with successful treatment for dehydration. If dry mouth symptoms occur frequently or return after treatment, the patient may need to have further investigations. These may include imaging studies and biopsies of the salivary glands, and tests to measure saliva production might be recommended as well.Orthostatic HypotensionDreamstimeOrthostatic hypotension occurs most frequently with mild dehydration. Also known as postural hypotension, it refers to a drop in blood pressure that occurs when a patient stands up from a sitting or lying position. Patients with orthostatic hypotension typically feel dizzy or lightheaded upon standing, and they could experience nausea, confusion, blurred vision, or weakness. Fainting may occur in some cases. Since orthostatic hypotension could be a sign of a serious medical issue, patients should see a doctor if they experience frequent episodes of lightheadedness or dizziness upon standing. Emergency medical care is necessary if fainting occurs. To diagnose orthostatic hypotension, doctors will measure the patient's blood pressure while they are sitting and standing. If the systolic measurements differ by more than 20 mmHg, the diagnosis is confirmed. Patients may also need to have blood tests to fully investigate their symptoms, and in some instances, an electrocardiogram may be necessary. During testing for orthostatic hypotension, patients should let their doctor know about their fluid intake and about any symptoms that may be connected to dehydration. Dehydration happens when a person does not take in enough fluid or loses too much fluid. Your cells and organs depend on water. Without it, the human body cannot function properly. The water in your body performs many tasks: Transports nutrients and oxygen Controls heart rate and blood pressure Regulates body temperature Lubricates joints Protects organs and tissue, including the eyes, ears, and heart Creates saliva Removes waste and toxins If you are receiving cancer treatment, you may be at a higher risk for dehydration due to side effects, such as diarrhea and vomiting. What are the signs and symptoms of dehydration? The longer you go without taking in enough fluid, the more dehydrated you will become. Thirst is one way your body alerts you to drink more fluid. However, sometimes you can become dehydrated without feeling thirsty. Other possible dehydration symptoms include: A dry or sticky mouth or a swollen tongue Fatigue or weakness Irritability Dizziness or lightheadedness Nausea and vomiting Headaches Constipation Dry skin Weight loss Dark yellow urine or a decrease in urination Severe dehydration can be life-threatening and needs immediate medical treatment. It can cause the following symptoms: Extreme thirst Low blood pressure Fever Rapid heartbeat Lack of urination for more than 8 hours Sunken eyes Inability to sweat Inability to produce tears Disorientation or confusion Talk with your health care team about any new symptoms or change in symptoms that you experience. What are the causes of dehydration? You lose water every day through natural body functions. These include breathing, sweating, and going to the bathroom. Most people easily replace that fluid through drinking and eating. But certain conditions affect the body's ability to stay hydrated. These include: Diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting. Cancer treatment, including certain types of chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and surgery, can cause these side effects. Fever. A high fever can cause dehydration. People receiving cancer treatment may be at risk for developing infections that can cause fever. Age. Infants, children, and older adults are at a greater risk for dehydration. Young children pass water and electrolytes out of the body frequently. Electrolytes are minerals that help regulate the body. As a person gets older, the body slowly loses the ability to conserve water. Older adults also are less likely to sense that they are thirsty. They may not eat or drink enough, especially if they live alone. Chronic illness. Many diseases – such as diabetes, cystic fibrosis, and kidney disease – increase dehydration risk and the need for fluids. For example, people with uncontrolled diabetes urinate frequently. Some medications can also cause a person to urinate or sweat more than normal. Environment. Living, working, and exercising in a hot or humid environment increase the need for fluids. People living at high altitudes, from 8,000 feet (2,400 meters) to 12,000 feet (3,700 meters) above sea level, also need more fluids. This is because their bodies lose water as they work to take in more oxygen. Exercise. Everyone loses water through sweat. Exercise can make you sweat more. Even if you do not see sweat, you are likely sweating. The more you exercise, the more fluid you need to replace. How is dehydration diagnosed? Your doctor can diagnose dehydration using several methods: Taking your vital signs, such as your blood pressure and pulse Testing your blood for factors such as your electrolytes and kidney function Testing your urine for the level of dehydration or to find out what may be causing dehydration How is dehydration treated? Relieving side effects, also called palliative care or supportive care, is an important part of cancer care and treatment. Treatment for dehydration depends on its severity. For mild dehydration, you might try the following: If you are able to drink, take in small amounts of fluid frequently instead of a large amount at one time. Drinking too much at once may cause vomiting. Keep a water bottle with you at all times, and sip from it throughout the day. Drink a large glass of water before bed and when you wake up each morning. Suck on ice chips or popsicles if you have trouble drinking or eating. Apply moisturizer to cracked lips and medication to mouth sores. This can make drinking and eating less painful. If you have diarrhea, choose drinks that have sodium and potassium to help replace these lost minerals. Keep ice and drinks within reach so you do not have to get up as often, if you are tired. You doctor may recommend an oral rehydration solution if you are not vomiting or experiencing diarrhea. In this case, you may be moderately dehydrated. Your doctor may prescribe fluids to given directly through a vein, also called intravenous (IV) fluids. In this case, you may be severely dehydrated. How can dehydration be prevented? The following tips can help keep your body's fluid balance in check: Drink lots of fluids. The amount of fluid needed each day to stay hydrated depends on your health, treatment, and lifestyle. Ask your doctor how much water you should drink. If you dislike plain water, try drinking flavored water or adding a slice of lemon. Other fluids can also help, including milk, low-sugar juice, and caffeine-free tea. Remember to avoid foods and drinks that may contribute to dehydration. Avoid alcohol. Choose drinks with low sugar and low or no caffeine. Water is often a better choice than fruit juice, soda, or coffee. Eat foods with high water content. Drinking water is the best way to hydrate. But many foods contain water and can also help replenish lost fluids. Choose foods such as lettuce (95% water), watermelon (92% water), and broccoli (91% water). Soup, popsicles, and yogurt also have high water content. Manage side effects. Cancer treatment can cause nausea, vomiting, or diarrhea. Talk with your health care team about ways to prevent or reduce these side effects and any concerns you have about dehydration. Monitor your environment and activity. Do not wait to drink water or other fluids. Make a conscious effort to drink regularly. Drink more often before you exercise and before you go outside in hot weather. During an illness or if you are feeling unwell, be proactive and drink water to stay hydrated in order to help your recovery. Related Resources Cancer.Net Podcast: The Importance of Hydration Side Effects of Chemotherapy When to Call the Doctor During Cancer Treatment More Information MedlinePlus: Dehydration American Cancer Society: Dehydration and Lack of Fluids

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