

How to Manage Dehydration at Home

This guide will help you understand:

What is dehydration?

What causes dehydration?

What you can do to help manage your dehydration.

When you should talk to your healthcare team.

One:carepath gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the many patients, caregivers and providers that were involved in preparing this Symptom Self-Management Guide.

What is dehydration?

When your body loses too much fluid and the fluid isn't replaced it's called dehydration. A fluid is anything that is a liquid at room temperature.

Dehydration can happen to anyone of any age and is common in older adults and those who have a chronic condition. Signs and symptoms of dehydration can include:

- Thirst, headache, dry mouth and lips.
- Feeling tired, dizzy or lightheaded.
- Peeing in small amounts and pee is dark and strong smelling.
- Constipation.
- Lack of appetite.
- Muscle cramps.
- Sunken dry eyes.
- Dry skin and or
- Confusion.



Tell your healthcare team if you are dehydrated and are finding it difficult to manage.

What causes dehydration?

Many things can cause dehydration such as having a fever, not drinking enough, vomiting, diarrhea, sweating or exercise. Other common causes of dehydration can be:

- **Chronic conditions:** Some chronic conditions such as liver, heart, lung disease, or cancer can cause you to *not* feel thirsty because of changes in your body.
- **Medications:** Some medications increase the amount of times you need to pee or make you sweat more.
- **Treatments:** Dehydration is a common side effect of cancer treatments such as chemotherapy or radiation therapy.
- **Difficulty swallowing:** Can lead to a decreased appetite [*not eating much*] and not drinking enough.
- **Taste Changes:** Because of a chronic condition, medications or some treatments like chemotherapy.
- **Pain:** Not drinking enough because it is too painful or tiring to get a drink or hold a drink, or go to the toilet.
- **Incontinence:** Choosing not to drink because of not being able to control when to pee.
- **Relying on others:** To help you drink or go to the toilet.
- **Not being able to tell someone you are thirsty:** Because you are sleepy or have difficulty talking.

What you can do to help manage your dehydration.

Managing dehydration works best when you play an active role.

- Try to figure out if there is a cause for your dehydration.
- Is it better or worse at different times?

- What helps or makes it worse?
- You may want to use a symptom diary to record information about your dehydration. Tracking this information will help you talk to healthcare team about your dehydration.

Physical steps you can try:

- **Medication:** If you take medication that cause you to pee a lot, continue to take it as prescribed but speak to your healthcare team about your concern of becoming dehydrated so it doesn't get too bad.
- **Eat foods high in water:** Some foods contain more water than others. For example, soups and broths, jelly desserts, ice-cream, or sauces and gravies.
- **Drink different types of fluids:** Fluids can include water, milk, pop, juice, tea/coffee, smoothies, frozen yoghurt and supplements such as Boost® or Ensure®.
- **Gentle exercise:** If it is safe for you, continue with gentle exercises like walking, swimming, riding a stationary bike every day or gardening. Stop what you are doing though if you feel dizzy, lightheaded or very tired.
- **Avoid:** Salt tablets, most people get enough salt in their diets. Also, if you are on a high protein diet make sure you drink 8-12 glasses of water each day.
- **Limit or stop:** Stimulants such as drugs, alcohol, caffeine and nicotine to see if your symptoms go away. These can make your dehydration worse.

If you care for someone who is dehydrated:

If safe to do so, increase choice and availability of drinks. Make drinks more appealing e.g., add lemon/lime or use nice pitchers/glass. Instead of asking "do you want something to drink?" say, "Here is some cool, refreshing water for you".

