

Kindly written by Jean Ross, Salts Community Stoma Care Nurse

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STOMA CARE

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Dehydration and you

Signs and symptoms to look for and how to manage them

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What is dehydration?

Dehydration is a condition that occurs when the loss of body fluids, mostly water, exceeds the amount that is taken in. With dehydration, more water is moving out of our cells and then out of our bodies than the amount of water we take in through drinking.

We lose water every day in the form of water vapour in the breath we exhale and as water in our sweat, urine, and stool. Along with the water, small amounts of salts are also lost.

When we lose too much water, our bodies may become out of balance or dehydrated. Severe dehydration can be life-threatening.

Mild dehydration is often observed because many people do not consume enough fluids. Mild dehydration and poor fluid intake can increase the risk of kidney stones and constipation.



Causes of dehydration in adults

Many conditions may cause rapid and continued fluid losses and lead to dehydration:

- High temperature, heat exposure, too much exercise, vomiting, diarrhoea, and increased urination due to infection
- Diseases such as diabetes
- Ostomists can be prone to fluid loss because part of their bowel has been removed and function can be compromised. This is especially important for ileostomists, because more of the bowel has been removed (*does not apply to urostomists*).

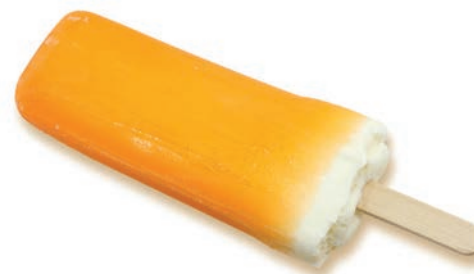
Signs to look for

The signs and symptoms of dehydration range from minor to severe:

- Increased thirst
- Dry mouth
- Weakness/lethargy
- Dizziness
- Palpitations (*feeling that the heart is jumping or pounding*)
- Confusion, sluggishness, even fainting
- Inability to sweat
- Decreased urine output: a darker urine colour may indicate dehydration
- Constipation – having a non-functioning stoma for more than one day (*applies to colostomists only*).

What to do if any of these signs occur

- Suck on ice lollies made from juices and sports drinks
- Suck on ice chips
- Drink carbohydrate/electrolyte-containing drinks



- If you are a diabetic, use only the rehydration solutions from the chemist
- The best treatment for dehydration is **prevention**. It is important that you understand the need for increased fluid intake.

How to prevent dehydration

Plan ahead and take extra water to all outdoor events and workplaces where increased sweating, activity, and heat stress will increase fluid losses.

Avoid exercise and exposure during high heat index days. Listen to weather forecasts for high heat stress days.

Avoid alcohol consumption, especially when it is very hot, because alcohol increases water loss and impairs your ability to sense early signs associated with dehydration.

Wear light-coloured and loose-fitting clothing if you must be outdoors when it is hot.

When dehydration is treated and the underlying cause identified, you will recover normally.

How much fluid should I drink?

The recommended daily amount of fluid

for an adult is a minimum of:

- Water: 2 litres per day
- Tea, coffee (unsweetened): 800ml – 1.2 litres per day

Other sources of fluid include soups and watery fruits and vegetables such as grapes, strawberries, tomatoes, watermelon, celery, cucumber, and zucchini.

It is important to consider the balance between fluids because certain drinks such as tea, coffee and caffeinated drinks are not hydrating and can actually be dehydrating.

Additional fluid:

450–500ml before beginning activity, as well as an additional 200–300ml every 10–20 minutes during activity.

How to prepare an oral rehydration solution

Mix together:

- 1 litre water
- 6 level teaspoons of sugar/glucose
- ½ level teaspoon of salt
- ½ level teaspoon of Sodium Bicarbonate
- Fruit squash to taste, if desired



Drink sips of the rehydration solution every 5 minutes until urination becomes normal and urine is clear and pale. Adults should drink up to 3 litres in 24 hours, until well.

If you have any other questions, always speak to your Stoma Care Nurse.