

# Health Tips for Parents

AUGUST 2015 | VOLUME 114

## How can I protect my child from dehydration?

Dehydration is a very common heat-related condition, and can be a dangerous consequence of diarrhea, vomiting and fever. In the most severe instances, dehydration can be life-threatening if left untreated.



“Dehydration occurs when the body loses more



water and salts than it replenishes,” says Carlos Lerner, MD, medical director of the UCLA Children’s Health Center.

The body naturally loses water daily through sweat, tears, breathing, urine and stool. In a healthy person, this water is replaced by drinking fluids and eating foods that contain water. When a person becomes so sick with fever, diarrhea or vomiting, or is overexposed to the sun and not drinking enough water, dehydration occurs. Whatever the cause, dehydration should be treated as soon as possible.

It is important to take precautionary measures to avoid dehydration by drinking plenty of fluids (especially when playing in the sun), scheduling outdoor activities during cooler times of the day, and drinking appropriate fluids to help maintain electrolyte balance. In addition to

dehydration, strenuous or prolonged activity during the hottest times of the day can lead to heat exhaustion or heatstroke.

The signs and symptoms of dehydration vary with severity. Symptoms may include thirst, less-frequent urination, dry skin, dry mouth and tongue, fatigue, light-headedness, dizziness, confusion, and increased heart rate and breathing.

If caught early, dehydration can often be treated at home under a physician’s guidance. In cases of mild dehydration, rehydration is recommended by drinking fluids. Sports drinks are advisable for prolonged exercise or long exposure to hot weather to help restore body fluids, electrolytes and salt balance. For moderate dehydration, intravenous (IV) fluids may be required. Severe dehydration should be treated immediately as a medical emergency, and hospitalization, along with intravenous fluids, will be necessary.

### Symptoms of dehydration in children

- No tears when crying
- No wet diapers for more than three hours
- Sunken abdomen, eyes or cheeks
- Skin that does not flatten when pinched and released
- Listlessness
- Irritability



### Tips to prevent dehydration

“Do not wait until you are thirsty,” advises Dr. Lerner. “Drinking water is the best choice in most cases. Sports drinks generally are high in sugar, so they are not the best choice during light activity or mild weather.”