

DEHYDRATION

By

Mark N. Monroe, M.D.

Dehydration is defined as loss of body fluid caused by illness, sweating, vomiting, diarrhea, or inadequate fluid intake. There are 3 types of dehydration: mild, moderate and severe. Mild symptoms include feeling thirsty, tired, headache, dry mouth, lips, and eyes. Moderate symptoms include dark yellow, concentrated, and strong-smelling urine in small quantity and less than 4 times per day frequency. Severe symptoms include feeling dizzy, lightheaded, or even fainting especially while changing positions such sitting or standing up quickly. Mild to moderate dehydration can be treated at home by increasing fluid intake and observation. Severe cases of dehydration need to be monitored in the hospital setting with IV hydration. Untreated severe dehydration can cause seizures, permanent brain damage, and even death. The skin becomes dry, the lips become dry and cracked, the eyes are sunken, and the state of mind becomes confused. The treatment includes oral fluids such as Gatorade for adults and Pedialyte for children. These not only restore the fluid balance, but also the electrolytes (i.e., salts). The normal amount of fluid consumption per day is 64oz on a cool, non-sweaty, non-vomiting, non-diarrhea day because of insensible water loss while breathing. Approximately 96oz of fluid intake per day is recommended when you are active, exercising, sweating, hot, vomiting, or have diarrhea. Never drink more than 128oz of fluids per day as that will dilute out your electrolytes which are needed for your muscles to function. Diuretics such as coffee, tea, chocolate, and caffeinated drinks make you more dehydrated and should not be counted as your fluid intake. Your family doctor will be the best one to advise you as to how much fluids you will need daily.