

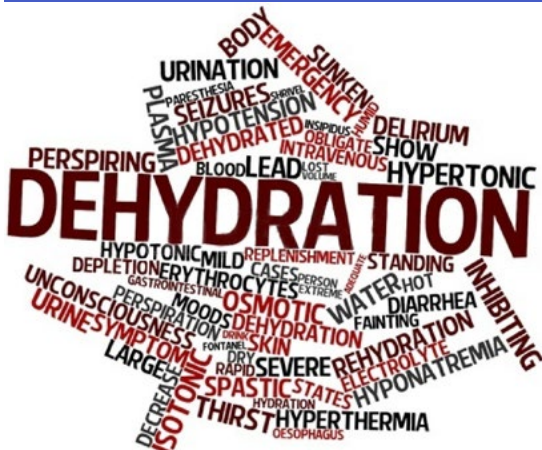


Division of
Developmental
Disabilities

State of New Jersey
Department of Human Services
Division of Developmental Disabilities

DDD PREVENTION BULLETIN

Dehydration



Dehydration is a loss of too much fluid from the body. The body needs water in order to maintain normal functioning. If your body loses too much fluid - more than you are getting from your food and liquids - your body loses electrolytes. Electrolytes include important nutrients like sodium and potassium which your body needs to work normally. A person can be at risk for dehydration in any season, not just the summer months. It is also important to know that elderly individuals are at heightened risk for dehydration because their bodies have a lower water content than younger people.

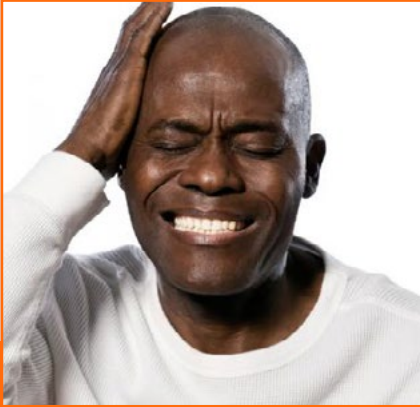
Why people with a developmental disability may be at a higher risk for dehydration.

- ❖ People with physical limitations may not be able to get something to drink on their own and will need the assistance of others.
- ❖ People who cannot speak or whose speech is hard to understand may have a hard time telling their support staff that they are thirsty.
- ❖ Some people may have difficulty swallowing their food or drinks and may refuse to eat or drink. This can make them more susceptible to becoming dehydrated.

Common Causes and Risk Factors for Dehydration:

- ❖ Diarrhea
- ❖ Vomiting
- ❖ Excessive sweating
- ❖ Fever
- ❖ Burns
- ❖ Diabetes when blood sugar is too high
- ❖ Increased urination (undiagnosed diabetes)
- ❖ Not drinking enough water, especially on warm and hot days
- ❖ Not drinking enough during or after exercise
- ❖ Some medications (diuretics, blood pressure meds, certain psychotropic and anticonvulsant medications)

Most Common Signs and Symptoms of Dehydration:



- ◆ Dry mouth and tongue with thick saliva
- ◆ Flushed face
- ◆ Confusion in older adults
- ◆ Flushed face
- ◆ Sleepy, difficult to wake up
- ◆ Dry, warm skin
- ◆ Dizziness
- ◆ General weakness
- ◆ Dark, concentrated urine
- ◆ Few or no tears when crying
- ◆ Headache
- ◆ Decreased urination
- ◆ Decreased skin elasticity

One test for dehydration is to lightly pinch the skin on the back of the hand. If it is slow going back into place, this may indicate dehydration. Mild to moderate dehydration can be corrected by drinking more water alone, but if severe dehydration develops, it can be a medical emergency!

In SEVERE DEHYDRATION, these additional symptoms will be present:

- ◆ Sunken eyes
- ◆ Low blood pressure
- ◆ A lack of sweating
- ◆ Rapid heart beat

Best Ways to Keep Hydrated and Avoid Dehydration:

- ◆ Always carry a water bottle for each person in the group when going out in the sun.
- ◆ Offer drinks throughout the day (not only at meals). People should have 8 -10 glasses of fluid every day unless otherwise indicated.
- ◆ Soda is not a good choice for rehydration because it contains too much sugar and not enough sodium to replace electrolytes.
- ◆ Increase intake of foods with high water content, such as fruits and vegetables.
- ◆ Encourage snacks like popsicles, Jell-O, diced fruit cup, apple sauce, and Italian ice since these have high water content.
- ◆ Increase fluid intake at the first signs of illnesses such as a cold or the flu.
- ◆ Use an air conditioner or fan in hot weather. Adults should never stay in temperatures over 100°F (37.8°C), especially indoors, without good air flow.



Sources

Mayo Clinic staff, *Dehydration*, downloaded from <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/dehydration/DS00561> on 05/27/2010.

Oregon Department of Health Services, *Developmental Disabilities Nursing Manual*, downloaded from http://www.oregon.gov/DHS/spd/provtools/dd/nursing_manual/dehydration.shtml on 10/21/2008.

<http://www.merckmedicus.com/patient-handouts/Dehydration>

Olmstead Resource Team



Physical Nutritional Management

