

## DEHYDRATION

Dehydration occurs when your child is losing fluids faster than she can replace them. This is most common with illnesses such as diarrhea, but can also occur with vomiting, colds or even with strenuous activity. Depending on the cause of the dehydration, your child may also be losing important electrolytes, leading to more severe illness.

When your child begins to become dehydrated you will notice that her energy level will be decreased, more than what you expect with the illness itself. You will also notice that she is not urinating as much as normal and that the urine will be a little darker with a stronger odor. This can be a difficult sign to look for, because if she has diarrhea, it is frequently hard to know if there is urine as well. If you do see at least 3-4 wet diapers in a 24 hour period, you can know your baby is doing OK, even if she is not perfect. Mildly dehydrated babies also tend not to make tears when they cry. Mild dehydration can often be treated at home with fluids (see below).

As dehydration becomes more severe, your child will have little interest in anything, including waking up to eat or drink. Her lips will be dry, and if you look in her mouth you will notice that she is not producing saliva (spit). She will make less than one wet diaper every 12 hours. These are concerning symptoms, and you should have her evaluated by a physician immediately as she will likely need IV fluids to help her feel better. In some cases, she may even need to be hospitalized until she is able to drink enough to keep up with what she is losing.

The treatment of dehydration focuses on getting more fluids into the child than she is losing. For nursing infants you can continue to nurse as long as she is tolerating it well and not vomiting. Frequently rehydrating solutions will be necessary to help as well. Infants under a year of age should drink something specific for their age like Pedialyte, but older children can try other things as well like Gatorade or Powerade diluted about half-strength. These drinks are easy for the baby or child to absorb, help replace the lost electrolytes and don't tend to upset the stomach as much as milk or formula might. Occasionally when children are vomiting as well, they will not even tolerate these drinks. If this is the case you can try just giving sips (no more than ½ ounce or 15 ml) of one of the drinks every 15-20 minutes. This sometimes makes the children angry because they are thirsty and want the drink, but if they take too much at once they will continue to vomit. Once they have started to keep down the smaller volumes, you can gradually increase how much they take at one time.

I often recommend parents try things like popsicles or Otter Pops when children are mildly dehydrated due to vomiting. These are nice slow-release liquids that are easily absorbed and have a little sugar to help with their energy level. The down side with these is that they do not replace the electrolytes, so as your child starts feeling better she will still need one of the above drinks. Older children can have about any clear liquid other than juice, so things like Sprite, ginger ale or sips of water are OK as well. Drinks like milk or formula that have some fat in them tend to be much harder on the stomach and will be more likely to cause

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