

DEHYDRATION

As most people know, you can only survive a fairly short time without water. Dehydration can have minor or severe health effects depending on how badly and for how long you are dehydrated. Sometimes related to dehydration, depending on circumstances, is Heat Exhaustion which may precede Heat Stroke

Symptoms of Mild Dehydration:

Thirst, of course. Dry mouth or thick mucous in mouth (If you are constantly thirsty even when you have access to water and drink it frequently you should check with your doctor as this may be a sign of a medical problem developing.)

Redness of face (when there is no other apparent cause)

Headache

Urine is dark and/or reduced amount

Dizziness and weakness, sometimes the inability to stand

Sleepy or irritableness

Cramps in arms and legs

General "unwell" feeling

Moderate to Severe Dehydration:

Fainting and low blood pressure

Strong cramps or contractions in arms, legs, stomach and back

Convulsions

Bloated stomach

Dry, sunken eyes with few or no tears

Skin looks wrinkled and loses its elasticity and firmness. To test, pull up some loose skin and release; if it takes a long time to return to normal, dehydration may be the cause. Some people also test by pressing the skin on the underside of a thumb to see

how quickly it "springs back". If it does not, suspect dehydration.

Fast but weak pulse and rapid, deep breathing.

In an infant, the fontanelle, the soft spot on the baby's head, is sunken, This does not apply to older people.

Heart failure is a possibility in a severe case.

Emergency situation:

If hydration does not start soon, in severe cases, signs are:

Hypovolaemic Shock (the inability of the heart to pump enough volume of blood) and low blood pressure

Lowered or no consciousness

No urine output

The "radial" pulse (underside of the wrist) may get faster and feebler or may become undetectable.

Cool, moist extremities

Cyanosis (blue tinge or colour) to the skin at the fingers and other extremities

*** Death may occur soon if rehydration is not started in time. This is to be considered a medical emergency and a hospital or paramedic situation if at all possible.**

FIRST AID:

Mild to Moderate dehydration: Dehydration not only is a depletion of water in the body but of electrolytes, potassium and sodium. While giving water would be the most likely first step, soups/broths (sodium) and soft fruits and vegetables (potassium) may be helpful too depending on severity and access to food. Sports drinks like Gatorade or special rehydration formulas especially for children may also be helpful and rehydrating and restoring electrolyte balance. Pedialyte seems to be readily available in drug stores in our area and all those are available over the counter. (Use of product names does not imply an endorsement.)

Moderate to Severe Dehydration: Depending on the severity of symptoms and age of the person, medical care may need to be sought for moderate dehydration and should be sought when dealing with severe dehydration. Call 911 or transport to the nearest clinic or hospital depending on circumstances. Remember, severe dehydration is a real and sometimes immediate threat to life.