

# 12 Science-Backed Ways to Help You Avoid Dehydration

Fatigue, dizziness, confusion — those are just a few of the unpleasant signs that you may be dehydrated. (1) To avoid them, you have to keep up with proper fluid intake.

“We lose water every day through natural bodily functions, but dehydration occurs when we lose more bodily fluids than we’re taking in,” says Jennifer Williams, MPH, a Columbus, Ohio–based nutrition scientist and hydration expert at Abbott. “Because humans are made up of mostly water and electrolytes, we need to maintain the proper balance of these in our system.”

Staying properly hydrated will not only help you avoid those negative side effects but it will likely help you feel better overall by improving your mood, boosting brain function, and preventing fatigue, Williams says. Here are 12 ways to prevent dehydration.

# 1. Pay Attention to the Possible Symptoms of Dehydration

Garth Graham, MD, the president of the Aetna Foundation and a cardiologist based in Hartford, Connecticut, says that becoming dehydrated generally doesn't sneak up on you. There are physical signs of dehydration, including headaches, fatigue, vomiting, and a flushed complexion, he says. You may also feel more irritable and like your energy has been zapped, says Sean Hashmi, MD, regional physician director of weight management and clinical nutrition for Kaiser Permanente in Woodland Hills, California. "The body is such an incredible machine that it has built-in mechanisms that allow you to know when you need more or less water," Dr. Hashmi says.

# 2. Respond to Thirst When the Feeling Strikes

The No. 1 sign that you're dehydrated? Feeling thirsty, says Rachel Lustgarten, RD, at Weill Cornell Medicine and New York-Presbyterian in New York City. She says that it's easy to get wrapped up in day-to-day activities and forget to respond to your thirst cues, but they're your body's way of "communicating with you that you need more fluids," Lustgarten says. Keep a water bottle nearby and take a swig whenever thirst strikes. Better yet: Try to drink water regularly throughout the day so you never reach that level. "I like to remind people to carry a water bottle with them and refill it throughout the day," Lustgarten says. You can try setting personal hydration goals, say by challenging yourself to finish the bottle before lunch and drink another one before you head home in the evening.

### **3. Check Your Urine Colour for Signs That You're Dehydrated**

Taking a quick peek at the colour of your urine when you use the bathroom can also clue you in on your hydration status. "We want our urine to be clear or a straw colour, like a light yellow colour, as opposed to a darker yellow or brown," Lustgarten says. A dark yellow colour is a definite sign of dehydration, she says. Consider it a hint that you need water — stat.

### **4. Assess the Inside of Your Mouth for Dehydration Symptoms**

Another simple way to gauge how well hydrated you are is to check the moistness of the inside of your mouth, Hashmi says. "In medical terminology, we say, 'Check the mucus membrane,' but basically, it's a simple way to check the inside of your mouth," he says. "If it's starting to get dry, you know you're running low on water."

### **5. Forget About 8 Glasses a Day**

That long-standing advice to drink eight glasses of water each day? Unfortunately, for most of us, that's not going to cut it. "That amount is only a general guideline and may not be enough fluid intake during more dehydrating environments or situations," Williams says. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine recommends that women drink 11.4 cups of water daily and men have 15.6 cups. The exact amount that'll be right for you depends on a few things, including age and activity level, Williams says.

## **6. Be Sure to Up Your Intake When Exercising**

Your body demands more water when you're exercising at a high intensity or for a long period of time. "Fluid loss through exercise can be really significant in the setting of an endurance athlete," Lustgarten says, adding that some high-performing athletes can lose up to 10 percent of their body weight through sweat during an athletic event. Keep in mind that this is most important for endurance athletes. "Most of us who get to the gym a few times a week don't have to be concerned about this," Lustgarten says. To determine your sweat losses and hydration needs, Williams suggests weighing yourself before and after exercise. "Losing less than 1 percent of your body weight during a workout is optimal," she says. "For every pound lost, at least 16 fluid ounces [fl oz] of water or an oral electrolyte solution should be consumed to rehydrate."

## **7. And Drink More Water When You're Sick or in Hot Weather**

Those of you dealing with severe cases of vomiting and diarrhea are at risk of becoming dehydrated. Hot weather is also a clue that you need to increase your water intake. "If it's hot outside, it's always better to have more fluid," Hashmi says, though he adds, "it's really hard to have a formula for how much to drink." It depends on factors like your body mass and how much you sweat.

## **8. Know if You're in a High-Risk Group for Dehydration**

"Dehydration can affect anybody, no matter how old — or young — they are, even if they're completely healthy," Williams says. That said, groups such as infants, children, and the elderly need to be especially careful not to become dehydrated. Williams says that babies and children feel the effects of fluid loss quickly, so it's important to call a pediatrician as soon as you suspect dehydration.

## **9. Bring in Extra Electrolytes When Needed**

Most of the time, drinking plain water is enough to fight off dehydration, Lustgarten says. But certain circumstances call for something more. “For those who are engaging in physical activities that last more than 60 minutes, it might be appropriate to replenish their electrolytes, which is most easily done through a sports drink,” she says. Williams says to drink about 4 to 8 fl oz of a low-carb electrolyte-containing beverage every 15 to 20 minutes when exercising for more than an hour. Just be sure to study the nutritional facts label first because many of these drinks can be packed with calories and sugar, Lustgarten says.

“If someone is going to the gym and really sweating it out, although they might benefit from a sports drink, we also want to be aware of how many calories that person is taking in in a day so they’re not cancelling out the hard work they’ve done at the gym,” Lustgarten says. She says that many brands make a low-sugar or calorie-free version, and she advises reaching for those options when possible.

## **10. Eat Hydrating Foods Throughout the Day**

You can also help prevent dehydration by filling your diet with fruits and vegetables that have a high water content. Lustgarten calls out melons, berries, grapes, and lettuce as being particularly hydrating.

## **11. Think Beyond Water to Help Stave Off Dehydration**

Lustgarten says that water should be your first choice when looking to rehydrate. Not a fan? No worries. “When it comes to hydration, all liquids count,” Hashmi says. “That can include coffee, juices, tea, and water.” You can add seltzer and carbonated water to the list, too, Lustgarten says. Just know that coffee can also be dehydrating when you drink too much, and sweetened juices and teas will never beat out plain water in the healthfulness competition. Also, keep in mind that certain foods can help prevent dehydration! Foods high in water include kale, watermelon, celery, iceberg lettuce, and strawberries.

## **12. Drink a Glass of Water When You Wake Up**

In addition to paying attention to what you're drinking, it's also important to pay attention to when. Williams recommends starting the day with a glass of water. "After spending eight hours in bed not drinking anything, it's easy to wake up in a dehydrated state," Williams says. This is especially crucial if you have a morning workout on the schedule.