



Dehydration is something we are all aware of –
but do you know what to do
when your little one gets dehydrated?

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REHIDRAT®
STAY HEALTHY. STAY HYDRATED.

Dehydration means that fluid is leaving the body faster than it is being replaced. It's important for parents to be able to recognise the signs of dehydration in babies and young children, as left untreated, it can have serious, even fatal consequences. Babies and young children are unable to communicate their needs well, so it's best for parents to be aware of the physical signs and take action promptly.

Dehydration can be caused by various factors including vomiting, diarrhoea, fever, very hot weather, sweating and reduced access to fluid intake. It's quite common in babies and young children because they're smaller and more sensitive to fluid loss^{1, 2}. The problem is that when there's not enough fluid in the body, it upsets the balance of minerals that enable all parts of the body to do their job properly³.

What are the signs of dehydration in babies and young children?

Any of these signs² could indicate that a baby is dehydrated - or is becoming dehydrated:

- A marked decrease in the number of wet nappies
- Cold hands and feet
- Urine that looks darker and smells stronger than usual
- A dry, parched mouth and lips and less elasticity in the skin
- Fewer or no tears while crying
- Eyes and fontanelle (the soft spot on the top of the head) appear sunken
- Lethargy, excessive sleepiness or fussiness.

Kitted out

Having a first aid kit in the home can save a life. ER24 says these items should be in all first aid kits:

- rehydration sachets such as Rehidrat
- sterile gauze
- bandages in several sizes
- large and small sterile dressings
- sterile eye dressings
- eye pads with bandages
- assorted plasters
- antiseptic wipes
- antibiotic cream
- pack of paracetamol tablets, including liquid paracetamol
- tweezers
- sharp scissors
- safety pins
- gloves
- CPR mouthpiece
- torch and spare batteries
- list of emergency contact numbers.

Facts about babies and dehydration:

- Their little bodies have relatively small fluid reserves and a high metabolic rate that makes it easier for them to lose the water and electrolytes needed for the body to function.
- If fluids are not replaced, the outcome can be critical within a matter of days, so it is best to take action sooner rather than later.
- Babies and young children are less able to communicate verbally, so watch for the physical signs of dehydration.
- "Dehydration caused by diarrhoea is one of the biggest single killers of children in the modern world and diarrhoea itself is one of the major causes of nutritional loss and poor growth. This year, about 2.2 million children will die of dehydration caused by diarrhoea - 80% of them in the first two years of their life."⁴

What's the best way to treat dehydration in young children?

- Prevention is always best, so if a child keeps vomiting or has a tummy bug, fluid intake should be topped up regularly.
- As babies are so vulnerable to dehydration, parents should get medical advice if they notice any of the symptoms or are in any way concerned.
- Severe cases of dehydration are usually treated in hospital where fluids and minerals are replenished via an intravenous drip. However, mild dehydration can usually be treated at home under the advice of a doctor^{1, 2}.
- Doctors often recommend an oral rehydration solution (ORS) in small and frequent doses to replenish lost fluids and electrolytes.

Ideal Solutions:

- Most juices contain too much sugar, and water alone does not contain the correct balance of salts and sugars needed to restore electrolytes lost due to diarrhoea and the like. Having an appropriate balance of electrolytes in an oral rehydration solution is of the utmost importance to help stop dehydration.
- REHIDRAT® is a good option as it is safe for babies older than 3 months and contains an optimal balance of sugars, salts and minerals to effectively treat dehydration and electrolyte loss due to gastroenteritis and diarrhoea. It contains no artificial preservatives, colourants or sweeteners and is available in 3 flavours - Blackcurrant, Orange and Vanilla. The Vanilla flavour is usually easily accepted by children as it is specially designed to taste sweeter. Available at Clicks, Dis-Chem and leading pharmacies. **RSP: R11.95 per sachet.**

Useful Tips¹:

- Even if a baby's diarrhoea or vomiting continues, keep offering small amounts of fluid at regular intervals as some will be retained in her body.
- Because sick babies often refuse to drink anything when they feel ill, some moms put the solution into a syringe and squirt a small amount gently into the side of baby's mouth. Care should be taken not to squirt the liquid into the back of the throat or squirt too much, too quickly as this may cause a baby to gag or choke.



¹ <http://www.parentdish.co.uk/baby/dehydration-in-babies-and-young-children-symptoms-treatment/>

² <http://www.babycenter.com.au/a557531/dehydration-in-babies#ixzz3UjIgyEZQ>

³ <http://rehydrate.org/dehydration/>

⁴ <http://www.medicinenet.com/electrolytes/article.htm>