



Jeb Bush  
Governor

M. Rony François, M.D., M.S.P.H., Ph.D.  
Secretary, Department of Health

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**PINELLAS COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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*Summer safety series*  
**Know the warning signs of dehydration**

Dehydration is a condition that occurs when a person loses more fluids than he or she takes in. Dehydration isn't as serious a problem for adults and teens as it can be for infants, young children or the elderly. Knowing the warning signs can help you and your family stay healthy this summer.

Your body is about 75 percent water. You would get dehydrated if the amount of water in your body dropped below the level needed for normal body function. Small decreases don't cause problems, and in most cases, they go completely unnoticed. But losing larger amounts of water can sometimes make you feel quite sick. Here, from the Pinellas County Health Department and [www.kidshealth.org](http://www.kidshealth.org), is important information about dehydration.

**Causes of Dehydration**

- One common cause of dehydration is gastrointestinal illness, when you lose fluids through vomiting and diarrhea.
- It's rare to reach a level of even moderate dehydration during sports or other normal outdoor activity. But if you don't replace fluid you lose through sweat as you go, you may become dehydrated from lots of physical activity, especially on a hot day.
- Some athletes, such as wrestlers who need to reach a certain weight to compete, dehydrate themselves on purpose by sweating in saunas or using laxatives or diuretics to drop weight quickly before a big event. This practice usually hurts more than it helps. Athletes who do this feel weaker, which affects performance. They can also have more serious problems, like abnormalities in the salt and potassium levels in the body. Such changes can also lead to problems with the heart's rhythm.
- Dieting can sap your water reserves as well. Beware of diets or supplements, including laxatives and diuretics that emphasize losing "water weight" as a quick way to lose weight. Losing water weight is not the same thing as losing actual fat.

**Signs of Dehydration**

If you become dehydrated, you need to restore the proper balance of water in your body. First, though, you have to recognize the problem.

Thirst is one indicator of dehydration, but it is not an early warning sign. By the time you feel thirsty, you may already be dehydrated.

*Other symptoms of dehydration include:*

- feeling dizzy and lightheaded
- producing less urine and darker urine
- having a dry or sticky mouth

**(MORE)**

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- If the condition progresses, you will start to feel much sicker as more body systems (or organs) are affected by the loss of fluids.

### **Preventing Dehydration**

- The easiest way to avoid dehydration is to drink lots of fluids, especially on hot, dry, windy days. Water is usually the best choice. Water doesn't add calories to your diet and can be great for your health. The amount of water you need to drink depends on factors like how much water you get from foods and other liquids and how much you sweat as a result of physical exertion.
- When you're going to be outside on a warm day, dress appropriately for your activity. Wear loose-fitting clothes and a hat if you can. That will keep you cooler and cut down on sweating. If you find yourself feeling parched or dizzy, take a break for a few minutes. Sit in the shade or someplace cool and drink water.
- If you're participating in sports or strenuous activities, drink some fluids before the activity begins. You should also drink at regular intervals (every 20 minutes or so) during the course of the activity and after the activity ends. The best time to train or play sports is in the early morning or late afternoon to avoid the hottest part of the day.
- If you have a "stomach bug" and have diarrhea or vomiting, you probably don't feel like eating or drinking anything. But you still need fluids. Take lots of tiny sips of fluids. For some people, ice pops may be easier to tolerate.
- Stay away from caffeine in coffee, sodas and tea. Caffeine is a diuretic (it makes you urinate more frequently than you usually need to).

### **When to See a Doctor**

Dehydration can usually be treated by drinking fluids. But if you faint or feel weak or dizzy when you stand up (even after a couple of hours) or if you have very little urine output, you should seek medical attention. The doctor will probably look for a cause for your dehydration and encourage you to drink more fluids. Occasionally, dehydration might be a sign of something more serious, such as diabetes, so your doctor may also run tests to rule out any other potential problems. If you're more dehydrated than you realized, especially if you can't hold fluids down because of vomiting, you may need to receive fluids through an IV to speed up the re-hydration process.

Remember – most cases of dehydration are preventable. So just keep drinking that water for healthy hydration.

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*The mission of the Pinellas County Health Department is to promote, protect and improve the health and safety of residents and visitors through public and private community efforts.*

[www.PinellasHealth.com](http://www.PinellasHealth.com)