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# The Signs of Dehydration in Children



Judy Koutsky  
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Find out the signs of dehydration in children and keep your kids healthy and active year round.

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Your kids are at school, clubs, sports and other activities throughout the day, so it's hard to know exactly how much water they're drinking. Should you be on the lookout for signs of

dehydration in children? Here's what you need to know.

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### **Signs of Dehydration in Children**

Dehydration in kids accounts for a number of hospital visits per year, yet it remains one of the most commonly overlooked conditions, notes [Dr. Eduardo Dolhun](#), a family physician, adjunct assistant clinical professor at Stanford University and the creator of the oral rehydration solution (ORS) [DripDrop](#).

"This is because many parents, teachers and other caregivers often do not know what to look for when diagnosing dehydration," says Dr. Dolhun. He explains that using the acronym D.R.I.N.K. can help parents recognize the early warning signs that their child may be dehydrated:

- **Drowsiness**

Exhibiting greater than normal fatigue or sluggishness.

- **Reduced Tears**

Eyes are less shiny or glossy, indicating reduced tears.

- **Increased Thirst**

Children are complaining of thirst and have difficulty quenching their thirst.

- **No Urine**

Urine output is decreased or darker in color.

- **Knuckle Test**

If all else fails, pinch the loose skin on the middle finger knuckle. If the skin does not snap back like a rubber band, your child may be dehydrated.

"Other signs include nausea, headaches, dizziness, lack of appetite, lack of sweat, dry skin, dry mouth and muscle cramps," says Dr. Jack Cornwell, the regional medical director for [CareWell Urgent Care](#).

### **Can Kids Get Dehydrated in All Seasons?**

Most parents are aware that dehydration is common in summer, but may be surprised to know it's possible in cold weather, too. The dry heat found in homes and schools as well as cold and flu season can be an impetus for dehydration, notes Dr. Dolhun. "Additionally, high altitude, dry climates, travel, increased physical activity and poor eating habits can also contribute to dehydration year round," says [Dr. Kerri Miller](#), a nurse practitioner and the developer of [re:iimmune](#), an ORS.

### **How Much Water Should Your Child Drink?**

While there's no golden rule for how much water kids should consume, the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) suggests you offer your kid water throughout the day not just when he says he's thirsty.

However, experts agree that kids need even more water than adults. "Their bodies are made of more water than adults, they use more of it and they don't conserve it as efficiently. Plus, their still-forming immune systems are at a greater risk for illnesses that cause vomiting and diarrhea, both of which hasten the loss of vital fluids and electrolytes," says Dr. Dolhun.

Plus, kids are less likely than adults to voluntarily drink enough water throughout the day, so it's important for parents and caregivers to regularly encourage and offer kids water.

### **What Should You Do If Your Child Is Dehydrated?**

"One way to rehydrate your child is to offer watermelon with a pinch of salt on it. The sodium is a necessary piece of the bodies' hydration process, and when offered with watermelon it provides a vehicle for the water to be absorbed," says Dr. Miller.

"Clear liquids are best for combating dehydration. Try not to give your kids sugary drinks, especially soda. Sugar can sometimes make dehydration worse," says Dr. Cornwell. "If you think that your child is dehydrated, introduce liquids slowly. Also, talk to your child's doctor. In extreme cases, they may recommend a commercial rehydration solution to help replace the lost sodium and potassium."

### **What Are Some Tips for Keeping Your Child Hydrated?**

To encourage your kids to drink water throughout the day and with meals, add fresh fruit to your water pitcher (slices of lemon, lime or even watermelon), suggests Dr. Miller. She also recommends avoiding any drinks with sugar, including sports drinks. When traveling, parents should make sure to hydrate kids days before and after a trip.

"If your kids play sports, make sure they are well hydrated even before they start to play," says Dr. Cornwell. "Coaches and parents should also make sure kids get frequent breaks -- about every 20 minutes -- to ensure they are staying hydrated throughout the game. If it's a hot day, monitor the amount of time they're spending outside in the sun."

*Judy Koutsky is the former Editorial Director of KIWI magazine, a green parenting publication. She was also Executive Editor of [Parenting.com](https://www.parenting.com), AOL Parent and [BabyTalk.com](https://www.babytalk.com).*

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