

Sneaky signs you may be dehydrated

We all get thirsty from time to time. But it's not just that feeling that can mean you're dehydrated – when your body doesn't have enough fluids. There are lesser known signs you should know to avoid a possibly life-threatening situation, says [Awad Alyami, MD](#), an OSF HealthCare pediatrician.

"You get less perfusion to tissues and organs," when you're dehydrated, Dr. Alyami says. "That can cause organ damage.

"Perfusion refers to fluid, nutrients and energy your organs need to function," he adds.

Unfamiliar signs

Take note of these things to keep an eye on for possible dehydration, especially if you are at high risk. For example, if you work an outdoor job in warm weather or if you look after someone who can't fully care for themselves.

- You've suffered burns. This means there is less skin tissue doing its job of keeping you healthy.
- Peeing isn't normal, such as expelling less urine.

"When you're hydrated, your urine should look yellow, pale yellow or sometimes almost transparent like water," Dr. Alyami explains. "When you become dehydrated, your urine will become less in volume, and the color will be darker. It goes into an orange color. It can have a smell, also."

- Crying without tears
- Skin changes, such as eyes appearing sunken in
- Fast heart rate
- Deep, heavy breaths

"When you're dehydrated, your blood can be more acidic. You'll try to get rid of some of that acid in your breaths," Dr. Alyami says.

- Bad breath
- Headaches
- Muscle cramps
- Food cravings
- Sudden weight loss. Dr. Alyami says one kilogram (or around 2.2 pounds) of weight loss means one liter of fluid loss. So if someone has lost two to four pounds quickly and unintentionally (for example, not because of a diet and exercise program), it's cause for concern.

What to do

Dr. Alyami says while dehydration can be serious, recovering doesn't have to be. Rest and drink fluids. Water or Pedialyte are go-tos.

"If the dehydration is because of decreased oral intake, the person might just need pain medicine so it's less painful to swallow while eating and drinking. If they are losing fluids from vomiting, we can give them medicine to stop vomiting," Dr. Alyami says.

If those steps don't work, Dr. Alyami says the person would likely get intravenous (IV) fluids in a hospital emergency department.

"You're probably going to be there for at least a couple hours. [Health care providers] want to make sure you can take fluids and keep them down before you go home," Dr. Alyami says. "Sometimes the dehydration is severe enough that we need to replace those fluids over one to two days."