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Home Management of Dehydration: A Quick Guide

Dehydration occurs when your body loses more fluid than it takes in, leaving it without enough water and electrolytes to carry out normal functions. While severe cases require immediate medical attention, mild to moderate dehydration can often be managed effectively at home.

Phase 1: Recognition

Before treating, identify the severity. Common signs of mild dehydration include:

- Extreme thirst and dry mouth.
- Dark yellow, strong-smelling urine.
- Dizziness or lightheadedness.
- Fatigue or "brain fog."

Warning: If you experience confusion, fainting, an inability to keep fluids down, or have not urinated in 8+ hours, seek emergency medical care immediately.

Phase 2: The Best Self-Care Technique

The gold standard for treating dehydration at home is **Oral Rehydration Therapy (ORT)**. This is more effective than drinking plain water alone because it replaces lost electrolytes (salts) that help your cells absorb water.

How to Perform ORT:

1. **Use an Oral Rehydration Solution (ORS):** Reach for products like Pedialyte, Hydralyte, or WHO-standard rehydration packets. These contain the specific ratio of glucose and electrolytes needed for rapid absorption.
2. **The "Sip, Don't Gulp" Rule:** Drink small amounts frequently—about **1 to 2 tablespoons every few minutes**. Gulping large amounts of fluid can trigger vomiting or bloating, worsening the condition.
3. **Temperature Matters:** Aim for room temperature or slightly chilled fluids. Extremely cold or hot drinks can sometimes irritate a sensitive stomach.

Phase 3: Supporting Recovery

Once you have started ORT, follow these steps to stabilize your recovery:

- **Avoid Diuretics:** Stay away from caffeinated coffee, tea, and soda, as well as alcohol. These can increase fluid loss through urination.
- **Modify Your Diet:** Stick to "water-rich" bland foods like watermelon, cucumbers, broths, or gelatin once you can tolerate solids.
- **Cool the Body:** If dehydration is heat-related, move to a shaded or air-conditioned area and apply cool, damp cloths to your skin.
- **Rest:** Physical activity increases fluid loss through sweat. Keep movement to a minimum until your urine is pale yellow.

Phase 4: Monitoring & Prevention

True recovery takes time. Use these parameters to ensure your body is successfully rehydrating:

- **The Urine Check:** Your ultimate goal is to see urine that is clear to pale yellow (like lemonade). If it remains dark or amber after a few hours of sips, continue ORT.
- **Track Weight Fluctuations:** If your dehydration was caused by intense exercise or heat, weighing yourself before and after activity can tell you exactly how much fluid you lost. Drink 24 ounces (approx. 700 mL) of fluid for every pound of body weight lost.
- **Gradual Transition:** Do not dive right back into heavy meals or intense workouts the moment you feel better. Allow your body 24 to 48 hours of baseline stability before resuming normal exertion.

Home-Made Rehydration Recipes

If you cannot get to a store, you can mix a basic solution using household staples:

Ingredient	Amount
Clean Water	1 Liter (approx. 4.25 cups)
Granulated Sugar	6 Level Teaspoons
Table Salt	1/2 Level Teaspoon

Instructions: Stir until the sugar and salt are fully dissolved. Drink small sips over the course of several hours.

There are other recipes that look to be easy to put together.

[Homemade Electrolyte Drink by EatingWell.com](#)

[Homemade Electrolyte Drink for Rehydration by dontmesswithmama.com](#)

[Oral Rehydration Solution Recipes from Dartmouth Health](#)

[Making Pedialyte at Home by GoodRx.com](#)

The above information was reviewed and validated by David Campbell-O'Dell, DNP, APRN-IP, FNP-BC, FAANP

