**Don’t Let Dehydration Put a Damper on Your Travels**

Have you ever considered that a simple activity, such as drinking water, can not only keep you at your best, but can save your trip from turning into a disaster? Drinking plenty of liquids is a crucial part of traveling. When you lose more fluid than you take in, dehydration – the loss of necessary water and salts in the body - is the result. If left untreated, it can be a very serious condition.

Travelers to some developing countries where tap water is unsafe might not drink as much as usual because they are advised only to drink bottled or boiled water.

“The human body is 2/3 water,” says Robert Quigley, MD, Regional Medical Director, Americas, for International SOS. “Water can be lost simply from breathing and normal perspiration. And travel to warm and dry climates coupled with physical exertion means the body needs more fluids.”

**Causes**

Travel can open the door to central causes of dehydration, even more so than everyday life at home. Major causes of dehydration include strenuous activity, excessive sweating, high fever, illness, prolonged vomiting or diarrhea (like traveler’s diarrhea), staying in the sun too long and prolonged exposure to high temperatures. Not drinking enough liquids to maintain your body’s optimal fluid level, overuse of diuretics and visiting a warm, dry region can also cause dehydration.

**Symptoms**

Do you know how to recognize when you or your traveling companions may be dehydrated? The basic symptoms of dehydration include dry mouth, thirst, rapid pulse and dark-colored urine. More severe symptoms include confusion, constipation, fever, pale and cold skin, rapid breathing and sunken eyes.

“Severe dehydration is the loss of 10 to 15-percent of a body’s fluids,” says Dr. Quigley. “This is life-threatening and requires immediate medical care. Confusion, loss of consciousness, rapid pulse, falling blood pressure, pale, cool and clammy skin, shallow breathing, anxiety, increased thirst, restlessness and possible shock are all potential symptoms of severe dehydration.”

Children are especially prone to dehydration. For youngsters under the age of two, the best way to monitor hydration is their weight. A weight loss of 5 to 9-percent is considered mild or moderate; and weight loss above 10-percent is considered severe dehydration.

**Prevention and Treatment**

The obvious way to prevent dehydration is to drink plenty of water. Sports drinks are also a good option. Keep water around and drink even if you do not feel thirsty. Limit caffeine and alcohol intake, including coffee, tea and cola. Caffeine and alcohol are diuretics and cause the body to lose more water.

“If you are experiencing mild to moderate dehydration, you should increase your fluid intake and electrolyte replacement,” says Dr. Quigley. “People with mild cases may be able to just drink plain water or other fluids and are usually cured in 24-48 hours. Those handling moderate dehydration may need sports beverages and additional salt.”

Severe dehydration may require hospitalization and intravenous fluid replacement. If in doubt about dehydration or its symptoms, call [International SOS](http://internationalsos.com/en/) for advice or to find a vetted and qualified doctor or hospital.

More information and tips are available at [www.internationalsos.com](http://www.internationalsos.com). Simply insert our membership number (XXXXXXXX) or visit our Intranet site at (insert link).

Disclaimer: This information has been developed for educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Should you have questions or concerns about any topic described here, please consult your healthcare professional.

Copyright 2014 by International SOS. Clients of International SOS may reprint this document for internal use.