

Dehydration

People with cystic fibrosis (CF) have an increased risk of dehydration which impacts many systems in the body, as it causes mucus to be thicker.

This can lead to an increased risk of infection in the lungs, as the thick mucus is more difficult to clear. Thicker mucus in the digestive system can lead to bowel obstructions.

Why are People with CF at Greater Risk?

Salt Loss

People with CF lose three to four times more salt from their sweat than those without CF. This puts them at increased risk during exercise, with fevers or infections and in hot weather.

Reduced Thirst Drive

The thirst sensation in people with CF does not turn on as quickly as for other people or may not be triggered at all.

Normally, when people sweat, the salt levels climb in the blood and this high salt in the blood triggers thirst. When too much salt is lost, like in CF, the person doesn't feel thirsty even after a lot of body fluid has been lost.

Voluntarily Drink Less

Research shows that youth with CF drink 50% less than healthy counterparts when given access to unlimited water.

It is important to remind young children with CF to drink water regularly.



Signs of Dehydration

Early Signs

- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Poor concentration
- Feeling tired/fatigue
- Dry mouth
- Salt crystals on the skin
- Thirst
- Dark urine colour

Late Signs

- Loss of appetite
- Nausea/vomiting
- Muscle cramps
- Thickened mucus
- Constipation

Preventing Dehydration

To prevent dehydration, both water and salt intake should be increased either through diet, supplements, or both.

More salt and water may be required when you are unwell, have a poor appetite, are having tube feeds, have increased exercise levels or live in a hot climate.

To avoid dehydration, people with CF should:

- Take salt supplements (tablets or liquid for infants/children) as advised by your CF dietitian or physician.
- Add salt to food e.g. table salt, sauces, gravies and condiments.
- Eat salty foods e.g. chips/pretzels, processed meats, rice crackers, white bread, salted nuts, bacon, baked beans, vegemite.
- Use 'salted' varieties of food.
- Drink plenty of water. Aim for two to three litres a day. Always carry a water bottle.
- Avoid exercising in the heat of the day.
- Drink sports drinks such as Hydralyte.
- Avoid diuretic drinks such as tea, coffee, soft drinks and alcohol.

Managing Dehydration

If someone becomes dehydrated, give fluids and salt tablet/solution if indicated. Keep them cool and allow them to rest. If they are displaying late signs of dehydration, emergency medical care may be required.

Salt Replacement

Individuals should always be guided by a CF dietitian as to individual salt requirements based on signs and symptoms.

A general guideline indicates:

Age	CF Population	General Population
Infants	500-1000mg	120-170mg
Children	1000-4000mg	200-800mg
Adults	6000mg	460-920mg

For further information contact your CF dietitian or CF centre.

Useful Resources

- [Salt Replacement Therapy for Adults with CF \(NEMO\)](#)
- [CFFood: A Guide for Adults \(CFWA\)](#)
- [CFWA Factsheets](#)

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Cystic Fibrosis WA
The Niche
11 Aberdare Road
Nedlands WA 6009

E: info@cfwa.org.au

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