



DEHYDRATION

Living with Crohn's or Colitis can sometimes mean that it's difficult to stay well hydrated. You may often have watery diarrhoea, or you may not feel like drinking because you're fatigued, in pain or feel sick. But being dehydrated may make you feel worse and can be very serious.

This information is for anyone affected by Crohn's or Colitis who would like to find out more about dehydration. Our information can help you:

- Watch out for the signs of being dehydrated
- Know the steps you need to take to stay hydrated
- Understand what to do if you become dehydrated

This information might use words you have not heard before. Our page on [medical words](#) can help provide an explanation.

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Key facts about dehydration

- Mild or moderate dehydration can usually be treated quickly. But it can become severe if it is not treated. Severe dehydration needs urgent treatment or it can lead to complications.
- Early signs of being dehydrated can include feeling thirsty and having dark yellow pee.
- You may be more likely to become dehydrated if you often have watery diarrhoea, have had your colon removed, have a stoma or short bowel syndrome.
- If you have symptoms of dehydration, drink plenty of fluids. This could be water or diluted squash. Keep drinking small amounts of fluids regularly.
- If you have a high output stoma or short bowel syndrome, speak to your GP or IBD team to find out what type of rehydration would work best for you.

WHAT IS DEHYDRATION?

Your body needs the right amount of water and minerals to work properly. Your body loses fluids during the day through:

- Sweat
- Tears
- Moisture in your breath
- Pee
- Poo

Usually, the fluid and salt from what you eat and drink make up for this loss. But you can become dehydrated if you lose more fluid than you take in. This can happen if you do not drink enough, or if you lose too much body fluid through:



- Sweating
- Being sick
- Diarrhoea

Being dehydrated can cause you to weigh less. This is because there is less water in your body. Dehydration can be described as mild, moderate or severe depending on how much of your body weight has been lost through fluids.

Mild or moderate dehydration can usually be treated quickly. If you are not treated, you can become severely dehydrated. Severe dehydration needs urgent treatment. Without urgent treatment, you can develop complications. This can include kidney problems or low blood pressure.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DEHYDRATION

Early signs of being dehydrated can include:

- Feeling thirsty
- Dark yellow pee

Other symptoms include:

- Not peeing as much as usual
- Strong smelling pee
- Feeling dizzy
- Feeling tired
- Dry or cracked lips, tongue and mouth

Contact your GP or call 111 if you think you have severe dehydration. 111 can also be accessed [online](#).

Signs of severe dehydration include:



- Being very thirsty
- A very dry mouth
- Fast breathing and fast heart rate
- Feeling confused, tired or drowsy
- Feeling dizzy when you stand up, and the feeling does not go away

CAUSES OF DEHYDRATION

Dehydration may not be a problem for everyone with Crohn's or Colitis. However, you may be more likely to become dehydrated if you:

- Often have watery diarrhoea.
- Are being sick, or vomiting, repeatedly.
- Have had your colon removed or have had ileal pouch-anal anastomosis (IPAA) surgery. This is also known as J-pouch surgery.
- Have a stoma, also known as an ileostomy.
- Have short bowel syndrome. Short bowel syndrome happens when the bowel does not have enough surface area to absorb nutrients from your food and drink. This can happen if you have had surgery to remove large sections of your small bowel.
- Have bile salt malabsorption. This is a condition that causes more bile than normal to be released from the gall bladder into the colon. This can cause watery diarrhoea.
- Are sweating a lot. This might be during hot weather or exercise, or because you have a fever.
- Are peeing more than usual. This can happen if you have uncontrolled diabetes, are drinking too much caffeine, or are taking diuretic medicines.



Diuretic medicines are sometimes called 'water tablets', and these can make you pee more.

- Have drunk too much alcohol.
- Are being sick or have diarrhoea because of a stomach bug, bowel infection or food poisoning.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I BECOME DEHYDRATED?

If you have symptoms of dehydration, drink plenty of fluids. This could be water or diluted squash. Keep drinking small amounts of fluids regularly. Avoid caffeine or alcohol as they can make dehydration worse.

Replacing salts and sugars

If you have been sick or have diarrhoea, you might need to increase the levels of salts and sugar in your body, as well as water. See the box below if you have a high-output stoma or short bowel syndrome.

Oral rehydration solutions (ORS) are powders or tablets that are dissolved in water. They help the body replace water, salts and sugar.

You can buy oral rehydration solutions from most supermarkets and pharmacies. Your pharmacist can recommend a rehydration solution that is right for you. Your GP or IBD team might give you a recipe to make your own ORS at home. Make sure you follow all instructions carefully.

If you have a high-output stoma or short bowel syndrome.

Speak to your GP or IBD team to find out what type of rehydration would work best for you. You are more likely to need more salt than most store-bought rehydration solutions provide. Your GP or IBD team may recommend drinking an oral rehydration solution with a higher salt level, also known as a sodium level.



PREVENTING DEHYDRATION

The easiest way to avoid dehydration is to make sure that you drink enough. The [EatWell Guide](#) recommends drinking six to eight glasses of fluids a day. Water and diluted squash are good choices to stay hydrated. When you are well hydrated, your pee should be a pale yellow colour.

You may need to drink more when there is a higher risk of becoming dehydrated.

This could be when:

- The weather is very hot
- You are sweating due to exercise
- You have diarrhoea or are being sick

Do not wait until you feel thirsty before you start drinking extra water.

Drinking more water than your body can process can make you very unwell or be dangerous. This can cause the amount of salt, or sodium, in your blood to become unusually low. Drinking too much fluid can make you:

- Feel sick
- Be sick
- Have a headache

In rare cases, it can cause:

- Confusion
- Fits
- Coma

Drinking too many fluids can sometimes even cause death. If you think you have drunk too much, contact a healthcare professional.



DIARRHOEA AND DEHYDRATION

If you have frequent diarrhoea, you may want to consider taking anti-diarrhoeal medicines. You should not take anti-diarrhoeal medicines if you are:

- In a flare-up. This is when your symptoms are worse or happen more often.
- If you have a high temperature.
- If you have blood in your poo.

You may not be able to take anti-diarrhoeal medicines if you have a narrowing in your bowel called a stricture. You should check with your doctor or IBD team before taking anti-diarrhoeal medicines.

KEEPING HYDRATED WITH A STOMA

If you have an ileostomy, food and drink pass through your small bowel, and waste comes out through an opening in your tummy called a stoma. Food and drink do not pass through your large bowel, which is where water and salts are usually absorbed. It is important to drink enough water to keep yourself well hydrated. Your IBD team may recommend that you add extra salt to your meals. This may be around a teaspoon a day.

Oral rehydration solutions (ORS) can be useful if you have short bowel syndrome or a high-output ileostomy. Your IBD team will let you know the best ORS for you. It is important that you follow instructions carefully. You may need to avoid drinking plain water while you are having an ORS.

If you have high or watery output from your stoma, your stoma nurse might recommend anti-diarrhoeal medicines, like loperamide. They may also recommend thickening sachets to put in your bag. This can help you manage your output.

Read more about eating and drinking with an ileostomy in our [life with a stoma](#) information.



HELP AND SUPPORT FROM CROHN'S & COLITIS UK

We're here for you. Our information covers a wide range of topics. From treatment options to symptoms, relationship concerns to employment issues, our information can help you manage your condition. We'll help you find answers, access support and take control.

All information is available on our [website](#).

Helpline service

Our helpline team provides up-to-date, evidence-based information. You can find out more on our [helpline web page](#). Our team can support you to live well with Crohn's or Colitis.

Our Helpline team can provide support by:

- Providing information about Crohn's and Colitis
- Listening and talking through your situation
- Helping you to find support from others in the Crohn's and Colitis community
- Providing details of other specialist organisations

You can call the Helpline on **0300 222 5700**. Or visit our [LiveChat service](#). You can read our information on [when the Helpline](#) is open for more details..

You can email helpline@crohnsandcolitis.org.uk at any time. The Helpline will aim to respond to your email within three working days.

Our helpline also offers a language interpretation service, which allows us to speak to callers in their preferred language.

Virtual Social Events

We offer people affected by Crohn's or Colitis the chance to join a virtual social event with others across the UK. The events will be a chance to chat, share experiences and potentially learn from others. Each event may have a specific topic but the overall discussion will be driven by what those attending wish to talk about.



Family, friends and colleagues are more than welcome to attend.

Visit our [Virtual Social Events](#) page to find out what is available.

Crohn's & Colitis UK Forum

This closed-group Facebook community is for anyone affected by Crohn's or Colitis. You can share your experiences and receive support from others. Find out more about the [Crohn's & Colitis UK Forum](#).

Help with toilet access when out

There are many benefits to becoming a member of Crohn's & Colitis UK. One of these is a free RADAR key to unlock accessible toilets. Another is a Can't Wait Card. This card shows that you have a medical condition. It will help when you are out and need urgent access to the toilet. See [our membership webpage](#) for more information. Or you can call the Membership Team on **01727 734465**.

ABOUT CROHN'S & COLITIS UK

We're Crohn's & Colitis UK and we're changing what it means to live with these lifelong gut conditions. 1 in 123 people in the UK have Crohn's Disease or Ulcerative Colitis. These are unpredictable conditions that could flare up at any time.

No one should face that alone. That's where we can help.

We provide trusted information and support cutting-edge research. We also lead bold campaigns to get more people talking about Crohn's and Colitis. We help people understand these conditions, give them the attention they deserve and bring people together to create change.

This year, 25,000 people will be told they have Crohn's or Colitis. Once diagnosed, the obstacles continue. Today, there is no cure. People simply don't understand these conditions. So, we have listened. It's time for change and we're leading the way.



Our information is available thanks to the generosity of our supporters and members. Find out how you can join the fight against Crohn's and Colitis by calling **01727 734465**. Or you can visit [our website](#).

About our information

We follow strict processes to make sure our information is based on up-to-date evidence and is easy to understand. We produce it with patients, medical advisers and other professionals. It is not intended to replace advice from your own healthcare professional.

You can find out more on [our website](#).

We hope that you've found this information helpful. Please email us at evidence@crohnsandcolitis.org.uk if:

- You have any comments or suggestions for improvements
- You would like more information about the evidence we use
- You would like details of any conflicts of interest

You can also write to us at **Crohn's & Colitis UK, 1 Bishops Square, Hatfield, Herts, AL10 9NE**. Or you can contact us through the **Helpline** on **0300 222 5700**.

We do not endorse any products mentioned in our information.

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