

HOT TOPICS

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Being outdoors in the summer provides many benefits for babies and young children but it is important to know that too much sun and heat can be dangerous. If you are out and about remember to dress your child in light cotton clothing with a hat. They need far less clothing out of air conditioning than in it. Use an umbrella and sunscreen. If you are carrying your baby in a pouch, remember that they can get very hot as a result of your body temperature as well as the pouch itself.

Does my baby or child need more to drink?

Babies and children like adults get thirsty and need more to drink in the heat. If you are fully breast-feeding you may find that your baby needs a few more quick feeds. The quick feed is predominantly foremilk, which satisfies their thirst. This is better than giving your baby water from a bottle because water and feeding implements are vehicles for the introduction of germs. Also and significantly, displacing breast milk with water can fill an infant's stomach and reduce the baby's appetite for nutrient-rich breast milk.

If you are formula feeding and you are out and about in the heat, you may have to give some extra water. Remember though that like breastfed babies you do not want to fill their stomach with water and reduce their appetite. You should use boiled, cooled, Hong Kong tap water in a sterile bottle.

Children who are weaning will also need more to drink when it is hot. It is best to give your infant plain water and not sugary drinks. Watery foods such as watermelon can be given. Again, be careful not to replace the milk component of the diet with water.

Heat Exhaustion

Heat exhaustion occurs when the body loses too much water and salt through sweating. It is more common in children when they have prolonged physical activity in the heat and don't have enough to drink. Babies can also suffer from heat exhaustion if they are exposed to prolonged periods of time in the heat and over wrapped.

Signs of Heat Exhaustion

- normal body temperature
- moist, pale, cool and clammy skin
- sweating heavily
- tired and weak
- headache, dizzy and feeling faint
- thirsty
- nausea and vomiting
- alert and aware

What to do

- Move the child to a cool place and rest

- Get the child to drink a glass of cool water or commercial sports drink if there is one available
- Get the child to eat a cracker or something slightly salty
- Sponge the child with cool wet cloths on the head, face and torso and fan the child
- Do not let the child participate in physical activity for the rest of the day
- Continue to offer drinks and food

Seek medical advice if

- The body temperature is very high (over 39.5 °C or 105° F) combined with dry hot flushed skin and no sweating.
- The baby, child or infant is unable to drink.
- There are signs of dehydration.

Signs of dehydration

- Sunken eyes and dry cracked lips with little or no saliva
- Listlessness and sleepiness
- No tears when crying
- Decreased amount of urine that is concentrated
- Poor skin turgor
- Sunken fontanelle (soft spot in an infant under one)

REMEMBER TO GIVE YOUR CHILD ENOUGH TO DRINK AND DO NOT GO OUT IN THE HEAT FOR EXTENDED PERIODS. BABIES CAN GET DEHYDRATED VERY QUICKLY AND DO NOT HAVE THE SAME ABILITY TO CONTROL THEIR TEMPERATURE AS ADULTS.

References:

National Safety Council (2001) 4th Edition *Pediatric First Aid and CPR*; Jones and Bartlett Publishers International London UK

Academy for Educational Development (October 2002) *Exclusive breast feeding: The only water source Young Infants Need: Frequently Asked Questions*, USAID