

# Tool Box Talk

## Winter Dehydration

We often associate dehydration with hot summer days, however it can still be a significant concern in the winter. Cold weather can mask the signs of dehydration making proper hydration important no matter what season it is.

### Understanding Dehydration

Dehydration occurs when our bodies lose fluids faster than we can replenish them. Cold weather may reduce our perception of thirst, but our bodies continue to lose moisture through breathing, sweating and other bodily processes. Several factors contribute to winter dehydration:

- **Reduced Thirst Sensation:** Cold weather can decrease your body's thirst sensation, making you less likely to drink enough water.
- **Increased Respiratory Water Loss:** Breathing in cold air can cause you to lose moisture through your breath, which adds to dehydration.
- **Sweating:** You may still sweat during physical activities in the cold and this sweat can lead to fluid loss.
- **Diuretic Effect:** Higher consumption of caffeine and alcohol in winter can escalate fluid loss due to their diuretic properties.

### Signs of Winter Dehydration

There are many signs of dehydration that we might ignore or not recognize. Identifying these signs is essential as they can progress rapidly, especially in cold conditions:

- Dry mouth, throat or skin
- Dark yellow urine
- Fatigue or weakness
- Dizziness, lightheadedness or rapid heartbeat
- Confusion or irritability

### Prevent Winter Dehydration

On the worksite, we must ensure our employees stay hydrated. Provide access to warm, clean drinking water and encourage regular breaks for hydration. If working outdoors, consider heated break areas. Educate employees to identify dehydration signs and encourage them to seek help if they notice symptoms in themselves or others.

To prevent winter dehydration, follow these tips:

- **Stay Hydrated:** Even if you don't feel thirsty, aim to drink water throughout the day. Keep a water bottle on hand and store it in a warm area to prevent freezing. Each person requires a different amount of water each day. To figure out your specific water intake take your body weight in pounds and half it, then drink that amount of ounces of water each day.
- **Eat Hydrating Foods:** Consume foods with high water content, like fruits and vegetables, to help with hydration.
- **Dress Appropriately:** Wearing layered clothing can prevent excessive sweating and moisture loss.
- **Monitor Urine Color:** Check the colour of your urine; it should be pale yellow. Dark yellow or amber urine may indicate dehydration.

### Rehydration Tips

Preventing dehydration by staying hydrated is ideal but in some cases, it may be too late. You could already be dehydrated and need to rehydrate. In this case, follow these tips to replenish your bodily fluids:

- Drink fluids containing electrolytes such as sports drinks.
- Drink milk. Milk is more easily absorbed by the human body than water. Milk has a slower release from the body due to proteins leading to greater fluid retention in the body.
- Do not drink fluids at a rapid rate as this can cause nausea and vomiting which can worsen dehydration.

### Conclusion

During winter, do not underestimate the importance of staying hydrated. Cold weather can deceive us into thinking we're not losing fluids, but the risk of dehydration persists. By following these tips and paying attention to your body's signals, you can ensure a safe and healthy winter. Staying hydrated is an essential part of our overall well-being, no matter the weather outside.

For more information regarding an employer's responsibility to provide clean drinking water at the worksite refer to: [Section 6-13 of the Saskatchewan Occupational Health and Safety Regulations](#)