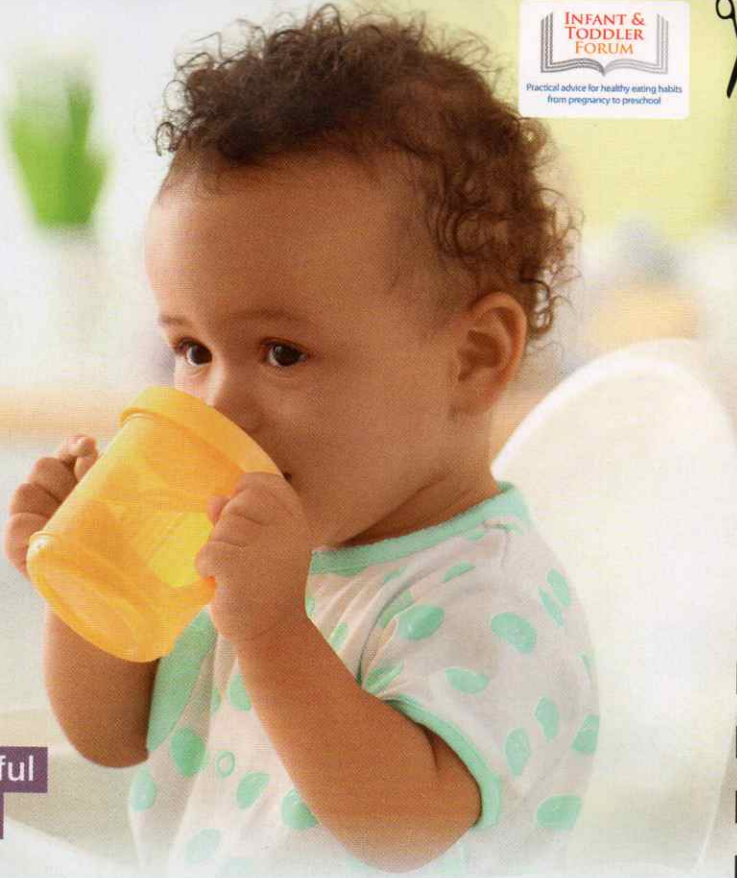




# Keeping toddlers hydrated



The Infant & Toddler Forum shares helpful information on recognising the signs of dehydration and how to prevent it

**D**rinks are an essential part of every toddler's diet. Toddlers have higher fluid requirements in relation to their size than adults and are less heat tolerant, putting them at a higher risk of dehydration. Early years practitioners are well placed to recognise the early signs and symptoms of dehydration and help parents prevent it occurring.

**How to spot dehydration**  
 Dehydration occurs when more fluid is lost than consumed in the body. Other than thirst and a dry mouth, dehydration in toddlers can lead to an array of lethargic symptoms, including tiredness, headaches, poor concentration and irritability.

Toddlers may not recognise the early signs of thirst or dehydration themselves, or be able to communicate them to others, which is why practitioners and parents need to be aware of the early signs. An easy way to monitor toddler hydration is to check the colour of their urine. If well hydrated, it should be a pale straw colour but if it appears darker then toddlers should be encouraged to drink more. A lower number of wet nappies or toilet visits compared to normal could also be a sign of dehydration.

Dehydration can also contribute to constipation, because a high percentage of stool weight is water. Toddlers who do not drink enough can develop hard stools that are difficult to pass. Constipation can cause

discomfort in toddlers and even impact on their appetite. Drinking plenty of fluids can therefore reduce the severity of constipation.

**Hydration tips**  
 It is important to not only encourage toddlers to drink regularly throughout the day, but also to ensure that the drinks they are consuming are good for their overall health.

- Here are some things to consider:**
- Toddlers should be offered six to eight drinks each day, alongside meals and snacks, but more may be needed in very hot weather or after physical activity.
  - The best drinks to give toddlers between and during meals and snacks are water and milk, as they do not damage toddlers' teeth.
  - From the age of one, toddlers should be offered drinks in beakers or cups instead of bottles as continued bottle-sucking can become a difficult habit to break and eventually have an impact on both their teeth and speech development.
  - Toddlers need less milk than they did in their first year of life. Milk does not damage teeth but should be limited to three drinks a day or less if they are eating plenty of dairy products such as yoghurt and cheese.

- Although all types of cows milk contain the same amount of protein, calcium and other nutrients, semi-skimmed milk contains less vitamin A and less energy, or calories, than whole milk. From 12 months onwards, children should be given whole milk as the vitamin A helps support their immune system. From 24 months onwards, children can switch to semi-skimmed milk if they are eating well and have a balanced diet.
- Sugary drinks such as fruit juices and squashes should be avoided as they can cause dental cavities. They should be well diluted – one part juice to 10 parts water – and limited to mealtimes only. Most sugary drinks, including fizzy drinks, are acidic which also dissolves the enamel on toddlers' teeth.
- Tea and coffee are unsuitable for toddlers as they can reduce iron absorption and increase the risk of anaemia.

**find out more**  
 For more information on hydration and advice on keeping toddlers healthy, read our 10 Steps for Healthy Toddlers guidance and download our Healthy Eating for Toddlers Factsheet (1.1) at [www.infantandtoddlerforum.org](http://www.infantandtoddlerforum.org)