Eight effects of dehydration you might not be aware of

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While many of us understand that staying hydrated is key to good health, the effects of dehydration can extend beyond simply feeling thirsty and having a headache.



For instance, a recent study led by researchers at Liverpool John Moores University found that people who habitually drank less than the recommended 1.5 litres of water per day showed elevated levels of cortisol – the body's primary stress hormone.

So, what other effects can dehydration have on the body?

1. BAD BREATH

"While we are familiar with common dehydration symptoms – such as tiredness, headaches, thirst, dizziness, reduced urine output, dark urine, and a dry mouth – there are several lesser-known effects that can occur if dehydration is not addressed," says Dr Naveed Asif, GP at The London General Practice. "For instance, bad breath can result from decreased saliva, which normally helps neutralise bacteria in the mouth."

2. SUGAR CRAVINGS

"It's also common to experience sugar cravings when dehydrated, as the liver requires water to convert glycogen into glucose for energy, leading to lower glucose levels in the body," says Dr Asif.

3. ELECTROLYTE IMBALANCE

Dr Nadira Awal, Doctify-rated GP, says: "Electrolytes such as sodium, potassium, and chloride are required for a variety of biological activities, including nerve signalling and muscle contraction.

"When the body becomes dehydrated, the equilibrium of these essential electrolytes can be upset. This imbalance can cause a variety of symptoms, ranging from minor muscle cramps to more serious consequences like involuntary muscle spasms and, in extreme circumstances, loss of consciousness."

4. PREMATURE SKIN AGEING

"Adequate hydration is critical for preserving skin flexibility and health," says Dr Awal. "When the body is persistently dehydrated, the skin becomes dry and less elastic, making it more susceptible to irritation and damage. Over time, this can lead to premature ageing and an increased risk of skin problems."

5. DROP IN BLOOD PRESSURE

"As the body loses fluids, blood volume falls, potentially leading to a reduction in blood pressure," notes Dr Awal. "This drop in blood pressure may result in decreased oxygen supply to tissues throughout the body. In severe situations, this can lead to hypovolemic shock, a lifethreatening condition in which the heart fails to pump enough blood to meet the body's requirements."

6. COGNITIVE IMPACTS

"Studies have demonstrated that dehydration can impair concentration, memory, and decisionmaking," says Dr Awal. "In more severe cases, it can create confusion and disorientation, which is especially dangerous in situations that need alertness, such as driving or operating machinery."

7. LOW ENERGY

"Inadequate water intake is often associated with fatigue and decreased physical performance," says Dr Awal. "Water transports nutrients and oxygen to cells throughout the body. When hydration levels are low, this process becomes less efficient, resulting in lower energy levels and poor physical performance.

"This can have an impact on everything from daily routines to athletic performance, thereby increasing the risk of injury when exercising."

8. KIDNEY STONES & UTIS

"Insufficient water intake can raise the risk of kidney stones over time by increasing the concentration of minerals and waste materials in the urine," explains Dr Awal. "This can lead to painful crystallisations in the urinary tract."