Migraine Trigger Guide:

Dehydration

Explanation

Your body is approximately 60% water.

Dehydration occurs as the result of excessive loss of water from the body, when we lose more water than we take in.

It's a bit more complicated than that since the body loses valuable electrolytes as well. That's why sports drinks have become so popular; they claim to replenish electrolytes in addition to fluid. Dehydration can be a major issue by itself, as well as a headache or migraine trigger.

Many people mistakenly think dehydration occurs only in hot weather and that you’re not dehydrated if you’re not thirsty. Both of these misconceptions lead to many cases of dehydration every year, some of them serious.

Trigger causes

- It takes an average of 64 to 80 ounces (1.9 – 2.4 liters) to replace the water our bodies lose in 24 hours.
- Under normal circumstances, how much water we need depends on the volume of our perspiration and urine output.
- Our bodies' need for water increases under circumstances such as:
  - warmer weather or climate
  - living at high altitudes
  - increased physical activity
  - with vomiting or diarrhea
  - with fever
  - with a cold or flu
  - if you have a chronic disease such as uncontrolled or untreated diabetes, kidney disease, alcoholism, cystic fibrosis, or adrenal disorders
  - if you are taking certain medications
  - during long air flights

- Losing as little as 1-2% of your body weight in water can result in
dehydration.

- Losing 3-5% can negatively impact reaction time, concentration and judgment.
- Losing 9-15% results in severe dehydration and is life threatening.

**How do you know if this is an issue?**

**Symptoms of dehydration:**
1. Excessive thirst
2. Fatigue
3. Muscle weakness
4. Headache (or in those susceptible, potentially a migraine attack)
5. Dizziness
6. Less frequent need to urinate and decreased output
7. Darker colored urine (should be nearly clear to pale yellow)
8. Confusion
9. Increased heart rate and respirations
10. Skin that doesn’t snap back when pinched and released

**Children may exhibit additional symptoms:**
- Absence of tears when crying
- No wet diaper for three hours or longer
- Irritability
- Lethargy
- Fever

**Options to try**

If dehydration is detected early, it can usually be treated at home, but a doctor should be consulted. Your doctor’s recommendations for treating dehydration may vary depending on the cause and severity of the dehydration, especially for children. Treatments for:

- **Mild dehydration:**
  - Rehydrate by drinking fluids including sports drinks, which rehydrate by providing not only fluid but also electrolytes and salts.
  - In children, products such as Pedialyte may be recommended as they also contain carbohydrates to help absorption in the intestinal tract.
  - Coffee, caffeinated tea, and soda should not be used for rehydration as the caffeine contained can be dehydrating.

- **Moderate dehydration:**
  - Rehydration may suffice, but IV fluids may be required.

- **Severe dehydration:**
Immediate action must be taken, treating the situation as a medical emergency. Hospital treatment is necessary for IV fluids to rehydrate more quickly and efficiently and to allow observation.

Prevention is the best treatment for dehydration. Preventive steps to take:

- Drink plenty of fluids and eat foods high in water. Fruit contains the most water, followed by vegetables, meat, and then grains with the least.
- Choose your beverages wisely. Caffeine and alcohol can be dehydrating. For some people, too much fruit juice can cause diarrhea, which can be dehydrating.
- If you’re planning a day with significantly more exercise than usual, you can begin hydrating the day before.
- Sports drinks can help maintain electrolyte balance, but be aware of the sugar content and other additives.
- Plan outdoor activities for cooler parts of the day.
- If you’re organizing outdoor activities, provide shaded areas.
- When you’re ill, be sure to continue drinking fluids, and get additional fluids if you experience fever, vomiting or diarrhea. Call your doctor for help with vomiting or diarrhea, if necessary.

Watch-outs

Remember that the following are dehydrating:

- caffeine
- alcohol
- vomiting
- diarrhea
- exercise

Make sure to replenish your fluids after these.

More reasons to manage this trigger

Learning to prevent and to recognize dehydration is essential. Remember to take in as much fluid as you’re losing each day.

If you tend to get dehydrated easily, discuss solutions with your doctor. Dehydration is an avoidable migraine trigger.