



Employee Safety

Winter Dehydration Facts: Causes, Symptoms and Prevention Tips

Vanessa Jo Roberts | Nov 14, 2019

Dehydration can sneak up on your workers in winter. No matter the season, hydration is an important factor in keeping your workers healthy, alert and productive.

Often, come cooler weather, people stop *feeling* thirsty.

But that doesn't reflect whether they are adequately hydrated. In fact, winter dehydration is a true problem. "People are more likely to get dehydrated in the winter than in the hottest months of the summer," points out the *Edison Institute of Nutrition*.

People don't *feel* like they are sweating, despite using up water stores because they tend to be wearing more clothing against cold temperatures. The addition of protective personal equipment and clothing further complicates this situation for workers in manufacturing environments.

"Perspiration tends to turn to water vapor very quickly, and extra layers of clothing—combined with the drier air—can cause our bodies to dehydrate without us even realizing that it's happening," explains the *Healthyway blog*.

What's more, "breathing cold and dry air causes the body to lose significant amounts of fluid" too, reports the *Summit Medical Group*.

Then, as people get cold and their body temperatures drop, the Edison Institute adds, their blood vessels constrict, which physically makes them *feel* less thirsty. And, when people feel less thirsty, they simply don't rehydrate often enough.

Winter Dehydration Facts: Hydration Impacts Productivity

The *Food and Nutrition Board* recommends that women generally need 91 ounces of water daily and men 125 ounces daily, adding that physical exertion can increase fluid needs.

As your employees experience winter dehydration, they become less productive. A 1 percent drop in hydration can lead to a 12 percent drop in productivity, according to *research shared by Waterlogic Australia*. And the effect builds, say the findings: At a 3 percent to 4 percent drop in hydration,

productivity can decrease between 25 percent and 50 percent.

It pays to keep your staff well hydrated, says Tom Ronay, M.D., of Circle Medical in an *interview on Medium*. "Proper hydration can increase employee productivity up to 14 percent."

Not sure where to focus your winter safety program? Here's help: "5 Less-Obvious Winter Safety Tips for Your Shop Floor."

Six Ways to Prevent Winter Dehydration

To help your workers meet their hydration needs, you will want to:

1. Maintain hydration stations year-round, not just in warm months.
2. Make your stations easily accessible to workers throughout the shop floor.
3. Use **portable coolers** so you can move your stations as needed for shifts or to special locations during peak cold snaps.
4. Provide a mix of water and **activity drinks** with added electrolytes to quickly rehydrate workers.
5. Create **custom signage** to encourage frequent drinking of fluids throughout the day.

Offer refillable bottles that workers can keep close at hand.

What Are the Symptoms of Dehydration?

Make sure that you train your safety team, managers and workers on what to look for when a co-worker may be dehydrated. Here are common mild dehydration symptoms:

- Dizziness
- Shortness of breath
- Headache
- Nausea
- Tiredness
- Lack of sweat (even during physical activity)

Dehydration, if not addressed early, can be dangerous: "You can usually reverse mild to moderate dehydration by drinking more fluids, but severe dehydration needs immediate medical treatment," reports the *Mayo Clinic*.

Replacing lost fluids is the only way to restore hydration. Often mild dehydration can be handled on-site by having an employee rest and drink fluids.

But, as *WebMD* details, if a worker has a seizure, is disoriented or confused, has a weak or rapid pulse, feels very tired, is dizzy when standing, is vomiting or is too ill to drink fluids, emergency care will be needed. Typically, doctors will supply fluids intravenously in severe cases.

Training on dehydration should emphasize that thirst is not a sign of *becoming* dehydrated. "Once you're thirsty," WebMD says, "you're probably already dehydrated, so it's best to drink plenty of fluids regularly."

Do you know the most common causes of dehydration? Find out in our "fact versus fallacy" article.