

Do Babies Need to Drink Water?

Doctors tell parents that babies less than 6 months of age should not drink water. Drinking too much water can hurt babies.

It puts them at risk for water intoxication.

Babies get thirsty and want something to drink. Research shows, however, that babies do not normally need extra water. Their bodies need breast milk or formula. Breast milk and formula provide proper fluid intake. They contain the calories that babies need for healthy growth and development.

Babies' kidneys, like other parts of their bodies, are not fully mature. When they drink too much water, their bodies get rid of sodium along with the water. This affects the baby's brain.

What are the signs of water intoxication?

- The baby may become irritable and drowsy;
- Her face may become puffy;
- His body temperature may drop; or
- She may develop seizures.

Often parents do not notice that anything is wrong until the baby has a seizure. If untreated, the baby can develop brain damage or die.

Doctors also tell parents to avoid:

- Over-diluted formula. Follow the instructions carefully when mixing formula.
- Pediatric drinks that contain electrolytes. If your baby is sick and you think he needs extra fluids, call his doctor.

So when can babies start drinking water? Talk to your doctor. Once your baby is sitting up and eating solid food, it should be OK to give her a little water from a cup. Until then, stick with breast milk and formula.



Did You Know?

Water intoxication can also occur during swimming lessons.

Babies under 12 months can swallow too much water while in the pool.

After a lesson, parents should watch their baby closely for changes in behavior. (See the article on page 4 for more information on water safety.)

Call the Parent Help Line. We listen. We can find you help.

1-217-544-5808 or 1-888-727-5889, 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., 7 days a week or log onto www.parenthelpline.org