

# Intravenous fluid therapy in children and young people in hospital

Information for the public

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## About this information

NICE guidelines provide advice on the care and support that should be offered to people who use health and care services.

NICE gives advice to doctors, nurses and other staff about how to look after people with different health conditions. This information is about the care that NICE says works best for children and young people who are in hospital and need intravenous fluids. Intravenous fluids are fluids that are given straight into a vein (often called 'IV' fluids or 'a drip'). Your healthcare team should know what NICE has said.

This information will tell you about what care NICE says you should expect and help you ask questions about it. It won't tell you lots about what it is like to have IV fluids. And it won't tell you about any health problems that mean you need IV fluids. Your healthcare team will explain all this, and answer any questions you have.

## *Who should read it*

This information is for children and young people who are in hospital and who need to have IV fluids.

It's important that you and your parents or other carers know about the care you should have.

We've written this information with parents, carers and older children and young people (12–16) in mind, but the information applies to all children under 16 years who are in hospital and who need IV fluids.

Parents and carers: it's really important that you read this information too so you know about the treatment and care the child you care for should be having.

## What are intravenous fluids?

Water, sugar and salt are important in helping the body to function. Intravenous fluids (usually shortened to 'IV' fluids) are liquids given to replace water, sugar and salt that you might need if you are ill or having an operation, and can't eat or drink as you would normally. IV fluids are given straight into a vein through a drip.

Making sure that everyone in hospital is getting the right amount of fluid is really important for good patient care. While you are having IV therapy you should be monitored regularly.

IV fluids should be stopped when you can eat and drink normally.

## Who will I see?

You will have a team of people looking after you. There will be doctors and nurses involved in giving you IV fluids, monitoring how you are, and checking you are getting the right fluids.

There is a [list of questions](#) you can use to help you talk with your healthcare team.

## Having IV fluids

If you need IV fluids a needle is put into a vein, usually in your hand or arm. The drip is attached to this and the fluid is given straight into your bloodstream.

## During IV fluid therapy

Your healthcare team should explain to you and your family or carers about why you need IV fluids, what will happen, what fluids are needed and for how long. This information should be added to your medical notes.

While you are having IV fluids, your healthcare team should monitor you regularly and record all the information on the chart in your medical notes. They will check to make sure you are getting the right type and right amount of fluid. Your healthcare team will need to know about how often you are going to the toilet and how much urine you are passing, check your weight, and will usually take blood and urine tests. You will be monitored carefully to make sure you are getting the right amount of fluid (not too much and not too little) and that the balance of water, sugar and salt is correct.

Getting the balance of fluids right is important. Your healthcare team will look for any signs that could mean you not getting enough fluid, or that you are getting too much fluid, or symptoms that could mean the balance of fluids needs changing.

If you notice any of these [signs](#) or if you are worried at all, talk with your healthcare team. Written information, for example information leaflets, should also be available for you and your family or carers.

## **Signs that could mean you are getting too little fluid or too much fluid, or the balance of fluids is wrong**

### *Signs that could mean you are getting too little fluid*

- Feeling thirsty.
- Not passing very much urine, and your urine is dark and strong-smelling.
- Dry or sticky mouth, coated ('furry') tongue, cracked lips.
- Feeling dizzy, especially when you stand up.

### *Signs that could mean you are getting too much fluid*

- Passing a lot of urine.
- Feeling out of breath, especially when you're lying down.
- Puffiness or swelling, especially around your face and ankles. This can be serious, so if you think there's a problem, tell a doctor or nurse straight away.

## *Symptoms of having the wrong balance of fluids*

- Feeling tired or drowsy.
- Headaches.
- Seizures (fits).

## Questions to ask about IV fluid therapy

These questions may help you and your family or carers talk about IV fluids with your healthcare team.

- What does having IV fluids involve?
- Why do I need IV fluids?
- How will I get the IV fluids? Will it hurt?
- How long will I need IV fluids for?
- How will my fluids be monitored?
- How will IV fluids help?
- Are there any side effects to watch out for?
- What tests will be needed?
- Will having IV fluids affect other medicines?
- Who should I speak to if I notice any problems?
- Do you have an information leaflet or is there a website on having IV fluids?

## Sources of advice and support

- Contact a Family, 0808 808 3555, [www.cafamily.org.uk](http://www.cafamily.org.uk)

You can also go to [NHS Choices](#) for more information.

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### *Accreditation*

