FACT SHEET ABOUT
Low blood sodium (hyponatremia)

Q. What is low blood sodium?
A. Low sodium occurs when the level of sodium in the blood Stream is lower than 135 milliequivalents (mEq/L). Normal levels are 136 – 145 mEq/L. Sodium plays a key role in maintaining blood pressure, the work of nerves and muscles, and regulates the body’s fluid balance.

Q. If left untreated, what can it lead to?
A. In chronic hyponatremia, sodium levels drop gradually over several days or weeks – symptoms are typically moderate. Sodium levels that drop quickly can result in potentially dangerous effects, such as rapid brain swelling, which can result in coma and death.

Q. Who is at risk for hyponatremia?
A. Possible conditions and lifestyle factors, including: hypothyroidism, water pills (diuretics – especially thiazides), polydipsia, medications (certain antidepressants, pain medications) that cause increased urination or perspiration, Addison’s disease, consuming excessive water during exercise, severe vomiting or diarrhea, dehydration, diet that is low in sodium and high in water, excessive intake of beer, cirrhosis of the liver, kidney problems, congestive heart failure, recreational drug Ecstasy, older adults, climate (exposure to hot weather).

Q. What are some of the signs and symptoms of hyponatremia?
A. Nausea and vomiting, headache, confusion, lethargy, fatigue, appetite loss, restlessness and irritability, muscle weakness, spasms or cramps, seizures, decreased consciousness or coma.
Q. **What is the treatment if signs and symptoms are noted?**
   A. The physician will do blood tests and possibly urine tests. The physician may recommend cutting back on fluids and adjust medications (diuretics). In severe cases intravenous fluids, medications to manage signs and symptoms, such as headaches, nausea and seizures. Hormone therapy if adrenal insufficiency (Addison’s disease).

Q. **What are some preventive measures?**
   A. Treat associated conditions (adrenal insufficiency), if taking diuretics know the signs and symptoms of hyponatremia, read medication inserts for side effects of hyponatremia, take precautions during high-intensity activities (athletes should drink only as much fluid as they lose due to sweating – usually no more than about 34 ounces of water an hour), and monitor fluid intake as per physician orders.


For more information on this or any other physical or behavioral health topic, please call the HCQU office at 888-321-5861 or visit our website at [www.hcqu.apshealthcare.com](http://www.hcqu.apshealthcare.com).

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