

This means that you have a low sodium level in the blood. Your body needs sodium for fluid balance, blood pressure control, as well as the nerves and muscles. The normal blood sodium level is 135 to 145 (mEq/L). When the sodium level in your blood is too low, extra water goes into your cells and makes them swell. This swelling can be a big concern in the brain, since the brain cannot expand past the skull.

## What causes it?

A low sodium level in your blood may be caused by too much water or fluid in the body. This “watering down” effect makes the amount of sodium seem low. Low blood sodium can also be due to losing sodium from the body or losing both sodium and fluid from the body.

- Kidney failure – the kidneys cannot get rid of extra fluid from the body
- Heart failure – your heart is not able to pump well enough so fluid builds up in the body
- Diuretics, or “water pills” – makes the body get rid of more sodium in the urine
- Some medicines, like certain antidepressants, medicine for acid reflux, and others – may cause more sweating or urinating than normal
- Severe vomiting or diarrhea – the body loses a lot of fluid and sodium
- Drinking more fluids than you need from habit or from feeling thirsty all the time

## How will I feel if I have this?

You may feel normal if your sodium is only mildly low. You may feel badly when the level of sodium in your blood goes too low or drops too fast. In severe cases, you may have one or more of the following:

- Nausea or vomiting
- Headache, feeling confused or very tired
- Low blood pressure
- Loss of energy
- Muscle weakness, twitching, or cramps
- Seizures or coma
- Feeling restless or having a bad temper

## How do you treat it?

Treatment is based on the cause and how low your sodium is. You may have to cut back on the amount of liquids you drink if you have extra water in your body. Your healthcare provider may also change your medicines. Here are some other things that may be done to help this:

- IV fluids that have sodium in them – they may be given through your vein to increase the amount of sodium in your blood. This is usually done in the hospital.
- Certain medicines – there are medicines that help your kidneys get rid of large amounts of urine. This makes the extra water leave your body and keeps the sodium inside your body.
- Eating more salt in your diet than you used to eat.
- If your kidneys are not working well you may need to have dialysis to decrease the extra water in your body.

If you would like to learn more about this, please go to this website: [www.kidney.org](http://www.kidney.org).