
Preventing Dehydration in Older Adults

Dehydration is when the body “dries out” because of drinking too little fluid, losing too much fluid, or both. Dehydration makes it difficult for your body to complete its normal functions. Normal fluid loss happens when breathing, urination, and sweating. Too much fluid can be lost through vomiting, diarrhea, or excessive sweating. Dehydration can occur quickly in older adults and may lead to serious health conditions.

You may be dehydrated if you experience:

- Dark colored urine
- Frequent urination and only able to pass a small amount
- Dry mouth or coated tongue
- Constipation or small hard stools
- Dry skin and sunken eyes
- Frequent urinary tract infection (UTI)
- Headache
- Confusion
- Dizziness or lightheadedness after standing up
- Fast heart rate
- Dry eyes
- Low blood pressure
- Low tear or sweat production
- Muscle cramps in arms or legs

You may not have all these symptoms at the same time, but all may be caused by not drinking enough fluids.

What can I do to prevent dehydration?

The best way to replace fluids is to drink enough daily and to eat foods with a high water content. Many older people do not feel thirsty and are not aware of the need to drink.

How much should I drink each day?

Fluid needs vary by individual. Factors that can impact fluid needs include illness, physical activity, weather, wounds, medications, and other health conditions.

According to the US Dietary Reference Intakes, older adults should aim to consume:

- Male: 13 cups (3.0 L) per day
- Female: 9 cups (2.2 L) per day

Check with your Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) for your specific fluid needs.

What should I drink?

At least half of what you drink should be water. Other fluid choices include:

- Calorie-free flavored water
- Low-sugar fruit or low-sodium vegetable juices
- Milk
- Decaffeinated or herbal teas
- Decaffeinated coffee
- Low sodium broth

Foods with a high water content:

- Popsicles
- Gelatin
- Ice cream
- Sherbet and sorbet
- Low sodium soups
- Fruits such as melon, berries, and peaches
- Vegetables such as cucumber, celery, and zucchini

What should I avoid drinking?

Beverages that can dehydrate you include:

- Caffeinated drinks such as regular coffee, tea, regular sodas, and hot chocolate
- Alcohol
- Soft drinks and sports drinks high in sugar
- Canned soups/broths that are high in sodium

Simple ways to drink more and stay hydrated:

- Use large, easy to hold cups
- Leave a glass of fluid at your bedside or sitting area
- Choose a variety of fluids based on what you like
- Drink fluids during and between meals
- Set an alarm or ask a friend/family member to remind you to drink enough fluid daily.
- Stay in a climate controlled area on hot days

Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) Contact Information

Name: _____

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