

Staying hydrated as we get older

Advice and guidance for people over 65, their family, friends and carers

What is healthy hydration?

Over **two thirds** of our body is made up of fluid. We need enough fluid in our bodies to stay healthy. Being well hydrated brings **physical benefits** (e.g. helping digestion, keeping skin healthy, aiding waste and toxin removal) as well as **mental benefits**, e.g. reduced tiredness and confusion.

What is dehydration?

Dehydration occurs when our bodies lose more fluid than we take in. This affects how well we function. Dehydration can be **life threatening** and can occur in two main ways:

1. Not taking in enough fluid every day, which is common among older people
2. A sudden unexpected fluid loss, for example diarrhoea and vomiting.

Why is hydration so important for older people?

People over 65 years of age have been shown to be more likely to become dehydrated than younger people. As we get older, our **sense of thirst decreases** and our **kidneys do not work as well**. It may also be more physically difficult to drink. Certain conditions, such as dementia and acute illness also increase the likelihood of becoming dehydrated.

What are the effects of not drinking enough fluid?

Becoming dehydrated affects our health, quality of life and wellbeing. Dehydration is a common cause of hospital admission and can slow down recovery time. Dehydration can also:

- Lead to infections, such as urinary tract infections
- Make the symptoms of other illnesses worse
- Increase the risk of constipation, falling and developing pressure sores
- Reduce mental performance (e.g. memory, attention, reaction times) and increase tiredness.



How do you know if you're dehydrated?

There are many potential signs, such as tiredness, thirst, dry mouth, dry skin, low blood pressure, confusion, dark urine or producing small amounts of urine. However, you can't rely on any of these signs to tell you if you are becoming dehydrated. Knowing what you are normally like and seeing some of these changes may indicate that you're becoming dehydrated. The only way to tell for certain is to have a specific blood test.

How much should we drink?

Aim to drink 6-8 drinks each day (1.5 to 2 litres in total). All non-alcoholic fluid counts, including water, tea, coffee, milk, fruit juice and smoothies. About a fifth of the fluid we need each day comes from food. Including more fluid-rich foods in your diet can help improve hydration too.

Tips for you:



Include a range of non-alcoholic drinks, e.g. coffee, fruit juice and smoothies. Aim for 6-8 drinks/day (a minimum of 1.5 litres)

Drink your favourite drinks little and often - every sip counts



Have fluid available to drink at all times, including when travelling

Having water bottles / jugs to hand can act as a visual reminder to drink



Have a full glass of fluid with medications

Make sure water is fresh and looks inviting, e.g. adding slices of lemon or ice cubes



Use the start or end of favourite TV programmes as triggers / reminders for a drink. Electronic or digital alarms / reminders may also help

Including more fluid-rich foods e.g. soups, tinned fruit in juice and adding sauces to meals, can help increase your fluid intake



Myth busting

Drinking more will mean more trips to the toilet - FALSE!

Not drinking enough can produce concentrated urine which irritates the bladder, increasing urgency and frequency. You may need the toilet more often after increasing the amount you drink, but this should settle after a few days.

Tea and coffee are dehydrating - FALSE!

All non-alcoholic fluids count towards your fluid intake. Caffeinated drinks like tea and coffee may irritate the bladder, and increase the frequency or urgency of passing urine, so consider choosing decaffeinated versions.

Helping someone to drink more

If you are a friend, family member or carer of someone who needs to drink more fluids, here are some things you could do:

- Make extra drinks during your visit and share drinks together
- Buy a range of drinks and fruits / smoothies
- Provide encouragement to drink little and often
- Suggest drinks from the person's childhood, or ice creams with wafers for fun alternatives
- Make a smoothie together with ingredients the person likes
- Buy a drinking aid, e.g. cup with electronic reminders to drink, or specialist cup with handles
- Set up electronic aids, e.g. alarms and reminders on devices may help the person drink more
- If the person has dementia, this PDF contains helpful tips: <https://wessexahsn.org.uk/dementialeaflet.pdf>

Where to go for help

- Your GP or Nurse for general issues
- Occupational Therapist for advice and guidance around specialist cups or products to support drinking
- Speech and Language Therapist for swallowing difficulties or if you notice you are coughing or gagging when eating or drinking
- Please continue to follow any specific advice from your medical team on how much you should be drinking.

🌐 wessexahsn.org.uk/hydration-at-home

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