

Hydration in Older People

Definition

Dehydration: your body does not have as much water or a fluid as it needs to function properly.

Dehydration can be mild, moderate, or severe depending on how much of the body's fluid is lost or not replaced.

Why are elderly people at risk of dehydration?

Water is vital to everyone, but there are lots of changes that occur as we age that increase our risk of dehydration. For example:

- Decreased sensation of thirst
- Decreased response to dehydration mounted by the kidneys
- Increasing incontinence
- Medical problems, such as diabetes, dementia, problems with eyesight, diseases affecting swallow
- Fear of falling
- Fear of incontinence
- Medications, such as diuretics (water-tablets)

Dehydration is a common contributor to ill health, admissions to hospital and when severe, death in older people but it is both treatable and preventable.

The benefits of good hydration

Maintaining a good level of hydration has several health benefits. These include:

- Prevention of pressure sores
- Aiding healing
- Reducing constipation
- Reducing water infections
- Reducing the formation of kidney stones
- Reducing postural hypotension (a fall in the blood pressure when going from sit-to-stand, resulting in dizziness)
- Improving mental function

- Reducing falls

How can dehydration be prevented?

During your inpatient stay, the staff on the ward will do all that they can to ensure that you (or your relative) receives an adequate amount of fluid, but there are also things that you could do to help.

- You/your relative will be offered a hot drink with each meal, and at 3 other occasions throughout the day
- You/your relative should have a jug of water available to you by your bedside. If this jug has a red lid, it is because you have been identified as needing extra help or encouragement with drinking
- If it is safe to do so (see below), please help us by encouraging/helping your relative with drinks
- Please let us know if your/your relative's water jug needs refilling
- Straws and beakers are available if you/your relative struggles to drink from a cup
- If you/your relative have soft drinks that you/they would prefer to those offered on the wards, please feel free to bring them in (if in any doubt regarding the suitability of these drinks, please check with a member of staff)

Please Note

- There are some cases when it is not safe for patients to drink without supervision, for example, if a patient cannot sit up, is drowsy or has difficulties swallowing
- If you are in any doubt about whether you/your relative can safely drink without supervision from the nursing staff, please ask one of the staff for help

Useful links

NHS Choices

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Dehydration/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

Age UK

<http://www.ageuk.org.uk/health-wellbeing/>

References

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency>

Essential Geriatrics, second edition, Henry Woodford (chapter 1)

Radcliffe publishing

ISBN 13: 978 1 84619 426 9

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16028569> - Strategies for ensuring good hydration in the elderly

Data Protection

Any personal information is kept confidential. There may be occasions where your information needs to be shared with other care professionals to ensure you receive the best care possible.

In order to assist us improve the services available your information may be used for clinical audit, research, teaching and anonymised for National NHS Reviews. Further information is available in the leaflet Disclosure of Confidential Information IL137, via Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust website or the PALS Service.

Information Leaflet:	NoIL404
Version:	1
Title:	Hydration in Older People
First Published:	January 2013
Review Date:	January 2015
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