

Fluid Needs of Older Adults



Why are fluids important for older adults?

Water is second only to oxygen in its importance to life. Everyone needs to get enough liquid each day to keep the body working properly.

Your body loses fluids through sweat, urine, and bowel movements. The body can normally keep liquid and chemicals (salts and minerals) in the body in balance by controlling how thirsty you feel or how much water you lose when you urinate or have bowel movements. If you are sweating or urinating more, or have diarrhea or more frequent bowel movements, your body loses more fluid. When this happens you need to drink more to replace the fluid you have lost. If you don't drink enough, the body adapts by taking fluids from the tissues, muscles, and organs. Not getting enough fluids to drink can be a serious problem for older adults. Even mild dehydration may cause constipation as well as other problems.

As you get older, your body's warning signals about not having enough fluid--such as thirst when your body needs more fluids--get weaker. After about age 50, you need to drink fluids even when you are not thirsty. This is particularly important if you have retired to a place that is warmer than you are used to, such as California, Florida, or the Southwest.

Some of the signs that show a need for more fluids are:

1. dry skin
2. fever
3. thirst
4. sunken eyes
5. decreased urination
6. confusion
7. dizziness

Thirst is not always a very good indicator of the body's need for more fluids, especially as you get older. A quick way to check that you are getting enough fluids is to look at the color of your urine. The urine should be pale yellow. If your urine is dark yellow and

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has a strong odor or if you go to the bathroom less often than 4 times a day, you probably need to drink more fluids.

What fluids should I drink to replace lost fluids?

Water is the best fluid to drink because it contains no calories, and it does not have chemicals that might affect fluid balance in the body. Most older adults need at least 1 and 1/2 to 2 quarts of water each day to be healthy. Here are some tips to get more fluids in your diet:

1. Drink plenty of fluids throughout the day.
2. Drink more fluids whenever you are vomiting or have diarrhea.
3. Drink extra fluids when you exercise, even after mild exercise.
4. Have more soups with your meals.
5. Keep a glass of water to drink while you are watching TV or relaxing.
6. Learn about medicines you are taking that might cause water loss.

Use caution and check with your healthcare provider about drinking sports fluids such as Gatorade when your diet is restricted or when you are taking prescription medicines.

Is it possible to get too much fluid?

If you have a healthy heart and kidneys, it is hard to drink too much fluid.

If you have heart failure or kidney disease, you may need to limit fluids and sodium (salt) because your kidneys are not as good at getting rid of fluid that the body does not need. Too much sodium and fluid intake can cause fluid to stay in tissues, usually in the feet and legs. This is a medical problem called edema.

Ask your healthcare provider about how much fluid you should drink each day.

Source: RelayHealth

http://www.ihacares.com/index.cfm/HealthAdvisors/SeniorHealthAdvisor/crs-sha-sha_fluid.intake.requirements.of.older.adults/

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