

Aging in Place: Staying Healthy At Home

Drink Water

The human body depends on water. Water helps carry nutrients to body cells, helps control body temperature, and helps prevent constipation. It also makes it easier to chew and swallow foods.

Every day, our bodies lose water. We need to drink fluids to replace what is lost and to keep body fluids in balance.



How does aging affect fluid needs?

Each day, most adults need about 1½ to 2 liters of fluids. Yet it is hard for some older adults to meet fluid needs. Some older adults don't feel thirsty, or don't want to drink too much. Others take medicines that can cause extra fluid loss. Examples are diuretics and laxatives. It is important for all of us to drink enough fluids each day.

What happens if someone doesn't get enough fluids?

A low fluid intake can lead to dehydration. This can be a serious health problem. Moderate dehydration can lead to muscle contractions, convulsions, fainting, and a rapid pulse. Severe dehydration can even cause death.

Drink enough fluids

Each day, drink at least 6 to 8 cups of fluids.

Here are some ideas:

- Plain water
- Water flavored with lemon
- 100% fruit or vegetable juice
- Soup or broth (low-salt or low sodium)
- Seltzer water (plain, flavored, or mixed with juice)
- Decaffeinated tea



What are the signs of dehydration?

You lose water through urination, respiration, and by sweating. If you are very active, you lose more water than if you are sedentary. Diuretics such as caffeine pills and alcohol result in the need to drink more water because they trick your body into thinking you have more water than we need.

Symptoms of mild dehydration include chronic pains in joints and muscles, lower back pain, headaches and constipation. A strong odor to your urine, along with a yellow or amber color indicates that you may not be getting enough water. Note that riboflavin, a B Vitamin, will make your urine bright yellow. Thirst is an obvious sign of dehydration and in fact, you need water long before you feel thirsty.

Talk to your health care provider for specific advice

If you have a medical condition, talk to your doctor. Find out how much fluid you should drink every day.

If you take medicines, talk to your doctor or pharmacist. Ask whether the medicines affect your fluid needs, and whether you need to adjust your fluid intake.

References

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<http://nutrition.about.com/od/hydrationwater/a/waterarticle.htm>

Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/healthywater/index.htm>

Massachusetts Department of Education

http://www.morethanameal.info/fact_sheets/drink_fluids.html

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