



Hydration for Older Adults

How to Stay Hydrated for Better Health

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Key Takeaways

Water is essential to almost all bodily functions, from lubricating our joints to pumping blood to our heart.

Older adults are more prone to becoming dehydrated for a number of reasons, including a diminished sense of thirst.

Finding simple ways to increase your water intake can help you avoid the complications of dehydration and stay healthy.

Water isn't just a refreshing thirst-quencher. It's essential to almost all bodily functions, from lubricating our joints to pumping blood to our heart. Staying hydrated is a key part of maintaining good health. That's why the advice to "drink 8 glasses a day" has become a familiar mantra on morning talk shows and in magazines.

What is the meaning of "hydrated"? Being hydrated simply means that your body has enough fluids to function properly. According to the **American Heart Association** <<https://www.heart.org/en/healthy-living/fitness/fitness-basics/staying-hydrated-staying-healthy>>, the amount of water each person needs can vary. A quick way to tell if you're drinking enough is to check the color of your urine. If it's pale in color and clear, you are likely well-hydrated. If it's dark-colored with amber or brown tones, you may be **dehydrated** <<https://medlineplus.gov/dehydration.html>> .

What is dehydration?

Dehydration is a potentially serious condition that can occur when you don't consume enough fluids for your body's needs. This can lead to health **complications** <<https://health.usnews.com/health-care/patient-advice/articles/what-older-adults-need-to-know-about-hydration>> ranging from

mild to life-threatening, such as urinary tract infections (UTIs), heat stroke, heart problems, kidney failure, and blood clot complications. Since dehydration affects the health of your cells, it can also lower your body's ability to ward off infections and heal from injury or illness.

Why dehydration is more likely to affect older adults

As you get older, it's even more important to stay hydrated. A study from the University of California, Los Angeles School of Nursing found that up to 40% of elderly people may be **chronically underhydrated**

<https://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/study-finds-a-lack-of-adequate-hydration-among-the-elderly> .

Seniors are more vulnerable to dehydration for a number of reasons:

- Appetite and thirst tend to diminish with age. This means that even when your body is craving fluids, you might not be aware of it—and you may drink less than you need to stay healthy.
- Older adults experience body composition changes over time that leave them with less water in their bodies to start with.
- Seniors are more likely to take medications that increase dehydration risk.

Additionally—according to a recent study—older adults' bodies don't regulate temperature as efficiently as those of younger people.¹ This means that during exercise or activity, seniors are more likely to become dehydrated through sweating.

Symptoms of dehydration

Even mild dehydration can cause an array of uncomfortable and debilitating symptoms. Understanding the warning signs can help you take action before the situation becomes severe.

Early dehydration symptoms include:

- Dark-colored urine, urinating less frequently
- Fatigue, or feeling weak
- Irritability
- Dizziness
- Headaches
- Muscle cramps in arms or legs
- Dry mouth
- Confusion, decreased cognitive function

The tiredness and lack of coordination that may result from dehydration can also lead to falls and injury. The best way to prevent dehydration is the simplest: drink more water throughout the day.

How much water do you need to stay hydrated?

As a general rule, you should take one-third of your body weight and drink that number of ounces in fluids. For example, if you weigh 150 pounds, aim to drink 50 ounces of water each day.

However, it's best to talk to your doctor to determine how much water you should be drinking daily. They can review your medical history with you as well as any over-the-counter or prescription medications you're currently taking. Certain medications cause the body to flush out more water. And some medical

conditions, such as cystic fibrosis, also make people more prone to dehydration.

How to stay hydrated every day

There are simple steps you can take to get the water your body craves. Below are some ideas to get you started:

Choose foods with high water content. If you have trouble drinking fluids, try including water-rich foods with every meal. These include cucumbers, watermelon, lettuce, strawberries, tomatoes and celery. Soups, broths and stews are also a good way to boost your fluid intake, especially in the colder weather. If you're watching your sodium, be sure to opt for low-sodium versions.

Keep water with you, always. Having hydration at your fingertips can make it easier to get the right amount of fluids. Carry a refillable water bottle with you wherever you go, or keep a lightweight water pitcher and cup near your favorite chair at home.

Avoid or reduce your alcohol intake. Alcohol is a diuretic, which means it prompts your body to remove fluids from your bloodstream. Limiting alcoholic beverages can help your body hang on to more of the water it needs to thrive.

Change it up. Pure, clean water is the best way to stay hydrated. But let's face it—drinking plain water all day can get boring! Try jazzing up your H₂O by adding slices of fresh lemon, apple, cucumber or berries. You may also choose to switch up water with other options such as low-sugar sports drinks or protein and nutritional shakes specifically designed for seniors. Coffee and tea can have a slight dehydrating effect, so they should not be counted toward your daily fluid intake.

Build hydration into your routine <<https://health.clevelandclinic.org/drink-up-dehydration-is-an-often-overlooked-health-risk-for-seniors/>>. Making it a point to drink water at certain times each day can help transform it into a healthy habit.

For example, consume a glass of water when you wake up in the morning, after every meal, and before and after exercise or activity.

If you're looking for additional tips on how to stay hydrated, ask your healthcare provider. Getting enough water each day is an easy yet vitally important way to stay healthy and active as an older adult.

Source

1. Meade, Robert D. et al. Aging attenuates the effect of extracellular hyperosmolality on whole-body heat exchange during exercise-heat stress, *J Physiology*,2020;598(22):5133-5148.