

Are you drinking enough fluids?

As you get older, it is important to drink enough fluids. Your kidneys do not make urine as well and you may not be aware that you are thirsty. Also, certain medications and health problems may affect how your body loses fluid.

Dehydration

Your body “dries out” because you do not drink enough fluid, or you lose too much fluid or both. Fluid can be lost with vomiting or diarrhea. This can occur quickly in older adults and the effects can be harmful.

Fluids are also lost through:

- sweating
- breathing
- excretion through urine and bowel movements

The best way to replace fluids is to drink. Many older people don't feel thirsty, so you may not be aware of the need to drink.

Why do I need so much fluid?

You need fluid for all your body functions such as:

- digestion, absorbing nutrients, minerals and vitamins
- temperature control
- electrolyte balance – keeping your salts and chemicals in balance
- breathing

Fluids are also needed to make the most of your brain's ability to learn. Everything your body does needs fluids!

How much water or fluid should I drink every day?

You need to drink 1500 to 2000 ml of fluid every day. This is 6 to 8 glasses of fluids every day. Sometimes your doctor will limit fluids if you have severe heart, kidney or liver disease.

What will be different if I have dehydration?

You may notice that you:

- have a dry mouth, or your tongue may be coated
 - are constipated, that is, your stools may be hard and small
 - have dry skin
 - have dark coloured urine
-

- go to the toilet often but only pass small amounts of urine
- may be at risk of developing a urinary tract infection
- have a headache
- may have a change in your thinking (confusion)
- are dizzy or lightheaded which may be caused by your blood pressure dropping when you stand up. This could lead to a fall.
- have a fast heart rate
- have dry eyes

You may not have all of these symptoms, but all may be caused by not drinking enough fluids.

Is there any easy way to check that I am drinking enough?

Check the number of glasses of water you drink, this should be 6 to 8 glasses unless limited by your doctor.

OR

Check the colour of your urine:

Pale yellow = good fluid intake! Keep up the good work.

Dark yellow = drink more water or fluids until the colour gets lighter.

What should I drink?

Good choices of fluid are:

- Water, fruit/vegetable juices and milk.
- Juices should never be the only fluid you drink. Milk can sometimes cause constipation. At least half of what you drink every day should be water.

Poor choices are:

- Canned soups, which can be a hidden source of high salt.
- Soft drinks and sports drinks, as they are high in sugar and can cause dehydration.
- Caffeinated drinks such as tea, coffee and hot chocolate because they may actually cause water loss and dehydration. Decaffeinated products are a better choice.
- Alcohol can also add to dehydration. The use of both caffeinated and alcoholic drinks should be limited.

Simple ways to increase your daily fluid intake

- Fill 6 to 8 glasses of water each morning and put in your fridge. Drink them throughout the day.
- Choose a variety of fluids based on what you like.
- Have more fluids between meal times, as well as with meals.
- Use large, easy to hold cups.
- Try carrying water with you when driving and doing physical activities.
- You may want to leave a glass of fluid at your bedside.