



Water (and other fluids)

This fact sheet aims to provide information on water, fluids, and the importance of staying hydrated.

Why is water/fluid important?

The human body is around 60% water, which is involved in all aspects of body structure and function; it lubricates the joints and eyes, aids digestion, flushes out waste and toxins, and keeps the skin healthy.

Why are older adults more vulnerable to dehydration?

Water is particularly important for older adults to ensure they are well hydrated, because feelings of thirst can reduce with age, increasing the risk of dehydration; they may have difficulty accessing drinks.

Older adults can have difficulty urinating, may urinate too much, or have a fear of incontinence, so may restrict their fluid intake, causing dehydration.

How much to consume?

The recommended amount of water per day is **2L with a minimum of 1.7L of water per day for the elderly.**



This assumes that there is no excess loss of water through e.g. profuse sweating, diarrhoea, vomiting, severe blood loss, high fever. The amount required by individuals will depend on many factors e.g. illness, activity levels, hot weather, body weight.

Exercise

Water lost through sweat when exercising must be replaced; dehydration will adversely affect exercise performance.

Risks associated with too little water

Inadequate hydration in the elderly is associated with increased morbidity and mortality. Older adults who are dehydrated are at particular risk of urinary tract infections and falls, so should monitor how much they drink, particularly in hot weather.

Signs of dehydration

Dehydration upsets the balance of minerals in the body, which adversely affects the way it functions. Some of the early warning signs of dehydration include:

- ◆ **Feeling thirsty and lightheaded**
- ◆ **A dry mouth**
- ◆ **Lack of energy**
- ◆ **Headaches**
- ◆ **Having dark coloured, strong-smelling urine**
- ◆ **Passing urine less often than usual**
- ◆ **Constipation**
- ◆ **Disorientation**
- ◆ **Confusion**

The colour of urine is the best way to tell if you are drinking enough; your urine should be straw or pale yellow coloured.

Did you know? . .

- ◆ **68.7% of the fresh water on Earth is trapped in glaciers.**
- ◆ **Water is the only natural substance on earth that can be liquid, gas or solid.**
- ◆ **Water expands by 9% when it freezes.**
- ◆ **It takes 75 litres of water to create 1 pint of beer!**

Sources of water in the diet

Water can be consumed as fresh water, foods with high water content (e.g. soups, cucumber, celery, tomatoes, watermelon, oranges), and other drinks (low in fat and sugar).

Tea and coffee are often a key contributor to liquid consumption and are a good way of getting older adults to drink; caffeinated varieties have a mild diuretic effect, however, still contribute positively to hydration.



It is worth noting that alcohol is a diuretic which induces the body to lose water and may cause dehydration. It also contains 7 kcal/g energy with no nutritional benefit!

Alcohol should be limited to a **maximum of 14 units per week** for both men and women.

Each week should have some alcohol-free days.

Tips to increase fluid consumption

- ◆ Don't wait until you feel thirsty—drink regularly throughout the day.
- ◆ If you drink a lot of coffee, tea or caffeinated drinks, alternate with decaffeinated drinks to avoid dehydration.
- ◆ Consume watery foods.
- ◆ Always have a jug of water nearby or a bottle of water with you.
- ◆ Drink water before and/or with meals.
- ◆ Add a slice of lemon or lime for flavour.
- ◆ If having a sweet drink, dilute with water and ice.
- ◆ Drink sparkling mineral water for a change.
- ◆ Try herbal teas.
- ◆ Drink extra when you exercise.
- ◆ Drink extra when losing fluid through sweat, vomit or diarrhoea.
- ◆ Drink water while waiting for your meal, coffee or tea to be ready.



See related Fact Sheets for more information on [Food groups](#), [Tips for healthy eating](#), [Salt](#), [Fibre](#), [Digestive issues? Some tips](#), and [Healthy eating and physical activity for healthy: Bones and muscles](#), [Heart](#), [Brain](#), [Immune system](#), [Digestive tract](#).

To see our detailed nutritional guide and example exercise programme, visit our [website](#)