

# KEY TIPS ON HYDRATION

## ENSURING OLDER PEOPLE REMAIN ADEQUATELY HYDRATED






The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) recommends that under normal environmental conditions with average physical activity levels, adult men should consume 2.5 litres of water each day and adult women 2.0 litres.<sup>1</sup> Yet while activity levels may decrease as we get older, as may the amount of water needed to maintain sufficient hydration levels, what is clear is that the body's need for water to remain adequately hydrated remains paramount.

Dehydration in older people is often serious and potentially life threatening. Those aged 85-99 years old are 6 times more likely to be hospitalised for dehydration than those aged 65-69.

Dehydration has many consequences, including an increased risk of falls, which themselves may be serious and life threatening, and also urinary tract infections, dental disease, lung disorders, kidney stones, constipation and impaired brain function.






However older people face unique challenges to ensure they take in enough water to avoid dehydration. These include:

-  Increased use of medications, some of which can increase water loss in the urine, block the thirst mechanism and affect hydration in other ways.
-  Some older people are less able or mobile, meaning they are less able to fetch themselves a drink. Impaired mobility may also cause deliberate restriction of intake to reduce the need for visits to the toilet. Memory problems can also make it difficult for older individuals to remember when they consumed their last drink or meal.
-  The function of the kidneys declines with age, meaning more water is lost and the need for water increases.

## HOW DOES AN OLDER PERSON ENSURE THEY TAKE IN ENOUGH WATER?




A crucial factor to remember is that water from most sources can count towards a person's daily intake, including food, soft drinks, tea, coffee, milk and simply water itself. An older person may not want to consume plain water in large amounts, so it may be helpful to include a variety of dietary sources to ensure enough water is taken in. A variety of sources, colours and flavours of beverages is as important as variety of food in nutrition. Variety stimulates greater levels of consumption of both food and beverages, and a varied diet may help to keep elderly people hydrated. It is important to remember that:



-  Drinks such as tea, coffee, soft drinks and fruit and vegetable juices, as well as watery foods such as soup, often contain between **80 – 95%** water.
-  Milk, also a good source of calcium, contains more than **85%** water.
-  Most beers and wines are over **85%** water and can contribute to water needs, although consumption is recommended only in small quantities due to the effects of alcohol. High strength alcohol products such as spirits are not recommended as they will promote water loss.
-  Fruit, including apples, oranges, grapes and strawberries, contains more than **80%** water, contributing to hydration as well as other health benefits.
-  Rice, eggs, pasta and seafood all contain approximately **two thirds** or more water, and all can contribute substantially to a person's daily water intake.



## WHAT CAN CARERS AND FAMILY MEMBERS OF ELDERLY PEOPLE DO TO HELP?

-  Carers and family members should provide advice to older people on how to hydrate themselves properly. Carers should encourage drinking by providing a variety of fluids, offering fluids at mealtimes and in between meals, selecting foods that are good for hydration, and discouraging the use of strong alcoholic beverages. Fluids should be readily available and physically accessible both day and night.
-  Carers should be alert to climatic extremes (e.g. hot summers) and any new medications so that appropriate hydration recommendations can be made.
-  Older people can become dehydrated in hospital when admitted for any reason. Medical professionals need to ensure the care plan of each elderly in-patient includes a variety of sources of hydration when the person is able to feed themselves, and adequate intravenous hydration in other circumstances. Relatives and visitors should be alert to the need for good hydration practices.