



Senior Health and Wellness Newsletter

Kentucky Department for Aging and Independent Living

The Importance of Proper Hydration

Adequate water consumption is essential to our body's health, especially as we get older. As we age, we tend to pay less attention to the body's signals and lose our sense of thirst. In addition, side effects from medications can diminish the body's water supply. This puts us at higher risk for dehydration which leads to kidney problems, constipation, urinary tract infections, and other health complications.

Our daily activities can affect our hydration status.

- Exercise increases our need for extra fluid. For most of us, an extra 1– 3 cups will be sufficient.
- If it is hot or humid, whether indoors or outdoors, you may need more fluids as well.
- Caffeine drinkers beware! Caffeine acts as a diuretic, pulling water out of our bodies and making us urinate more. Caffeine consumption can cause dehydration and fluid loss.

Getting enough fluids is important due to the vast roles water plays in our body. These functions include:

- Moistening tissue such as those in the mouth, eyes, and nose.
- Protecting body organs and tissues;
- Helps prevent constipation;
- Helps dissolve minerals and other nutrients to make them accessible to the body;
- Regulates body temperature;
- Lubricates joints;
- Lessens the burden on the kidneys and liver by flushing out waste products;
- Carries nutrients and oxygen to cells.



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How much is enough?

The Dietary Reference Intakes (DRI) are a set of recommendations from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) that estimates daily nutrient requirements for healthy individuals. For those over the age of 50, the DRI recommends about 11 cups of fluids for women and 15 cups per day for men.

This can include not only water but other fluids (preferably ones without added sugar or caffeine). This may seem like a lot but we can also get fluids from the foods we eat. Many of the foods we eat contain fluids. Fruits and vegetables have the highest water content. Foods high in water are often low in calories, nutrient dense, and help you maintain a healthy body weight!

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Pay attention to the signals of thirst and dehydration.

Another thing we can do to be sure we are getting enough fluid is to be mindful of what our body is telling us and pay attention to signals of thirst and dehydration.

Mild dehydration : Dry & sticky mouth, fatigue, thirst, low urine output, dry skin, headache, constipation, dizziness or lightheadedness.

If symptoms of mild dehydration are present, drink fluids right away.

Severe dehydration: Extreme thirst, irritability or confusion, very dry mouth/skin/mucous membranes, lack of sweating, little or no urination, sunken eyes, shriveled and dry skin (no elasticity), low blood pressure, rapid heart rate, rapid breathing, fever, no tears when crying, delirium or unconsciousness.

If symptoms of severe dehydration are present seek medical attention right away!

To sum things up, it is an extremely simple concept to walk away with,

Drink more water!

For More Information:

- Mayo Clinic.—Nutrition and Healthy Eating. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/water/NU00283/NSECTIONGROUP=2>
- USDA DRIs—<http://fnic.nal.usda.gov/dietary-guidance/dietary-reference-intakes>

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