

Healthy Eating: Fluids¹

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Why is water so important?

More than one half of an adult human body weight is water! Water is the medium of all the fluids in our body. It brings nutrients to the cells in our body, and removes the wastes. Our bodies cannot function without adequate water.



Water helps to:

- ✓ Convert food into energy
- ✓ Regulate our body temperature
- ✓ Protect and cushion our vital organs
- ✓ Keep us “regular”

What happens if we don't get enough water?

When we take in less water than we lose, our body becomes dehydrated. We lose water in urine, sweat, and feces. We get water by drinking water and other fluids. We also get water from foods, especially fruits and vegetables.

One third of healthy persons 65 years or older have mild dehydration!

Low fluid intake or dehydration can cause:

- ✓ Difficulty swallowing
- ✓ Dry mouth due to low saliva production
- ✓ Headaches
- ✓ Fatigue
- ✓ Loss of appetite
- ✓ Dry eyes
- ✓ Muscle cramps
- ✓ Urinary stone disease

Why is fluid intake a concern for older persons?

Dehydration is common in older people.

This may be due to:

- ✓ Not realizing we are thirsty
- ✓ Decreased ability to concentrate urine
- ✓ Self-imposed fluid restriction

We need to drink enough water and other fluids to stay hydrated. Since older people may not realize they are thirsty, they may need to plan their fluid intake.



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How much fluid should we drink?

Most older persons need to drink about 6 to 8 cups of fluids a day. The amount needed depends on :

- ♦ Body weight
- ♦ Activity level
- ♦ Health condition
- ♦ The environment



Factors that increase fluid needs are:

- ♦ Eating high fiber foods or taking a fiber supplement
- ♦ Taking several medications, especially diuretics for high blood pressure
- ♦ Hot weather
- ♦ Vigorous physical activity

What kinds of fluids are best?

Drink fluids that you enjoy. Limit those that are high in sugar or sodium. Drink water and some of the following high nutrient drinks every day:

- ✓ Fruit juices (100% juice, about 6 fluid ounces a day is enough)
- ✓ Vegetable juices (low sodium type)
- ✓ Low-fat milk
- ✓ Vegetable or milk-based soups

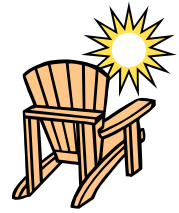


Tips for drinking more water

You can get more water by doing some of the following suggestions each day. Which of these ideas work for you?

- Welcome the day with a cup of water.
- Drink a cup of water about ½ hour before meals.
- When you take a medication, drink it with a full glass of water! (Best for most medications; check with your pharmacist.)

- Drink a cup of water during and after spending time outdoors.
- Fill a water bottle and carry it with you during the day.



How do I know if I am well hydrated?

You're probably doing fine if your eyes are moist and tears come out as usual.

Where can I get more reliable information?

Speak with a registered dietitian (RD). You can find an RD in your area through The American Dietetic Association at their toll free number, 1-800-366-1655 (available in English and Spanish). Web site:

<http://www.eatright.org>

Or, call your local county Extension agent. Look for "Cooperative Extension Service" in the blue pages of your telephone book; in Florida you can find your county Extension office at the University of Florida IFAS Extension Web site:

<http://extension.ifas.ufl.edu>

Or, at the following Web sites:

- ✓ National Agricultural Library, U.S. Department of Agriculture:

<http://www.nutrition.gov>

(Nutrition and health information and resources)

- ✓ National Library of Medicine:

<http://medlineplus.gov>

(Drug information, medical terms, provider directories, and more)

- ✓ U.S. Department of Agriculture:

<http://www.usda.gov/cnpp>. (Nutrition education for adults and children/youth, including MyPyramid, Dietary Guidelines, nutrient content of foods, and more)