

## DEHYDRATION IN SENIOR ADULTS

Dehydration is a major cause for hospitalization among senior adults and it can be life-threatening. Elderly citizens are more susceptible to dehydration due to less fluid content in the body. Dehydration occurs when a person loses more water than they take in because it takes an adequate amount of fluid for the body to function properly. That normal level of hydration varies widely from person to person.

Mild dehydration is defined as losing two percent of your body weight. Severe dehydration occurs with four percent or greater body weight loss. Even mild dehydration can affect a person's health, especially if he/she already has cardiac or renal problems.

Water is lost through activities like sweating, urination, and exhalation during breathing. Elderly dehydration is especially common for a number of reasons: some medications are diuretic or may cause patients to sweat more; a person's sense of thirst becomes less acute as they age and as we age our bodies lose kidney function and are less able to conserve fluid. Illness, especially one that causes vomiting and/or diarrhea, also can cause elderly dehydration. Some older people deliberately restrict their water intake in an effort to cope with incontinence, and others may not drink enough to meet their fluid requirements because their mobility is impaired to the extent that they have difficulty getting something to drink. For these reasons, elderly people are at risk of serious dehydration when they are faced with situations that can promote water loss, such as hot weather or physical illness.

Dehydration, depending on the severity, sometimes creates only small telltale signs while having a big effect on the body. Very often, the signs of dehydration are more or less similar to dementia and Alzheimer's symptoms. Following are some of the signs of dehydration in the elderly.

- Confusion
- Constipation
- Dizziness
- Dry or sticky mouth
- Fever
- Urinary tract infections
- Dry and poor elasticity skin
- Increased heart rate
- inability to sweat or produce tears
- Muscle weakness
- Sunken eyes
- Headache
- Irritability
- Pneumonia
- Weight loss
- Less urine output
- Low blood pressure





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If allowed to continue unchecked, dehydration may lead to falls, stroke, renal failure, and death.

To help make sure you or your loved one doesn't suffer from dehydration, make sure he or she consumes an adequate amount of fluids during the day; eats healthy, water-content foods such as fruit, vegetables and soups; checks that urine color is light and output adequate. Seniors also need to be educated to drink even when they're not thirsty. Keeping a water bottle next to the bed or their favorite chair could help, especially if they have mobility issues. The best way to prevent dehydration in the elderly is drinking lots of water, and other healthy drinks. Foods and drinks containing sodium and potassium should also be consumed to restore the electrolyte level in the body. It is also advisable to monitor the fluid intake and output, and check the body weight regularly.

If any of these symptoms is observed in an elderly person, it is advisable to consult and seek advice from a qualified physician.