Fluids and Dehydration — Concerns for Older Adults

The human body is more than 60% water. Blood is 92% water, the brain and muscles are 75%, and bones are about 22%. A human can survive for a month or more without eating food, but only a week or so without drinking water.

Dehydration occurs when people don’t have enough fluid in their bodies. The ability to feel thirst lessens with age so you may not realize when you need to drink more. You may find you have to urinate more often so you are losing more fluid. As we age, our bodies start losing muscle and gain fat (sarcopenia). Muscle holds water but fat does not, so as we age, our body water decreases. Medications that increase urination (diuretics) or help constipation can also cause dehydration. It can be caused by diarrhea, vomiting, overheating, diabetes, high fever, or excessive sweating. Dehydration is a serious problem and can result in death if it is not taken care of.

Symptoms of Dehydration

♦ Thirst
♦ Dry mouth
♦ Dark yellow urine
♦ Fatigue
♦ Irritability

Life threatening symptoms — Go to the ER or contact your physician right away:

♦ Dizziness
♦ Feeling of blacking out when sitting up or standing
♦ Confusion
♦ Muscle weakness or cramps
♦ Sunken eyes
♦ Low blood pressure
♦ Increased heart rate

Tips for Staying Hydrated

♦ Drink about eight cups of fluids every day — water, flavored waters, milk, juices, sodas, coffee and teas.

♦ Don’t wait until you are thirsty to drink — keep a water bottle with you when you are out and about and drink from it regularly.

♦ Eat fruits and vegetables: Fruit with water content from 92 to 74% (highest to lowest): Watermelon, strawberries, grapefruit, peaches, pineapple, cranberries, oranges, raspberries, apricots, blueberries, plums, apples, pears, cherries, grapes and bananas. Vegetables with water content from 96 to 79% (highest to lowest): Cucumbers, lettuce, zucchini, radishes, celery, tomatoes, cabbage, cauliflower, eggplant, peppers, spinach, broccoli, carrots, green peas and white potatoes.

♦ Drink extra in extreme heat to replace the water lost from sweating.

♦ Limit alcohol consumption — it makes you urinate more.
Recommendations:

- Read the nutrition facts label and know what you are drinking.

- Beverages are measured in fluid ounce (fl. oz.). 8 fluid ounces equals 1 cup. Whether the beverage is bottled, canned or pre-poured, the container size has already been determined. Most people do not consider the actual serving size of their beverage, whether it is 12 oz., 16 oz., 20 oz. or larger.

- Recommended daily intake of beverages for an adult (at least seven cups per day):
  - 8 oz. 100% fruit juice = 1 cup
  - 16 – 24 oz. low-fat milk = 2 to 3 cups
  - 32 – 40 oz. other fluids, preferably water = 4 to 5 cups

- Most sweetened beverages contain approximately .7 teaspoon to 1.2 teaspoons of sugar per ounce. One teaspoon of sugar = 16 calories. An average 20 oz. sweetened beverage contains between 224 calories to 320 calories!

- Choose water, diet or low-calorie beverages.

- When you opt for a sugar-sweetened beverage, request a smaller serving – some companies are now selling 8 oz. cans and bottles of soda.

- For a quick, easy and inexpensive thirst-quencher, carry a reusable water bottle and refill throughout the day.

- Avoid purchasing sugar-sweetened beverages – out of sight, out of mind. Keep a pitcher full of ice cold water in the refrigerator.

- Drink low-fat milk or ice water with a wedge of lemon with meals.

- Mix 100% fruit juice and seltzer for a low-calorie, refreshing beverage.

- Soft-drinks, fruit punches, flavored coffees, sports drinks, and other sweetened high calorie beverages provide no nutritional value and may contribute to poor dietary habits, increased body weight and health-related diseases.

So think before you drink!

References:
The Nutrition Source, www.hsph.harvard.edu/nutritionsource/healthy-drinks/

ATTENTION SENIOR CITIZENS: Have a nutritional question or concern? If you are participating in a senior meal program, you are eligible to have a free consultation with a Registered Dietitian. Call 372-1622, extension 269, for more information.

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