

Drinking a sufficient quantity of fluids in old age – information and tips for home and in-patient care

Why is it important to drink enough?

Our body constantly loses water through the kidneys, lungs, intestines and skin, and we therefore need to replenish it regularly. Water is essential for all our organs to function properly.

However, the sensation of thirst decreases with age, and we therefore lack an important warning signal for fluid deficiency. Some care recipients even avoid specifically requesting a drink, as they don't want to burden others. Anxieties around uncontrolled urine leakage and increased toilet use in public or at night may also be reasons for not drinking enough.

Possible effects of a lack of fluids:

- Constipation
- Fatigue, exhaustion, dizziness, lack of concentration, "states of confusion"
- Falls
- Reduced kidney function
- Circulatory disruptions, perfusion disorders and collapse
- Inadequate hydration is one of the most common reasons for hospitalisation in older adults



How much and what?

- The recommended daily fluid intake is approx. 1.5 litres.
- The need for fluids increases with higher indoor or outdoor temperatures, diarrhoea, fever and the ingestion of certain medicines.
- Tap water, mineral water and unsweetened fruit and herbal teas are the best form of fluids.
- Juices and soft drinks are not good thirst-quenchers.
- Coffee does not quench thirst, but may nevertheless be included in the daily fluid balance.

Tips for care:

- Place drinks in a visible position. Actively offer drinks.
- To encourage drinking, you can toast each other and enjoy a drink together.
- Offer foods with a high water content, e.g. fruit, cucumber, tomato, lettuce and melon - particularly on hot days.
- Water with lemon or herbs, juice spritzers, fruit and herbal teas, a non-alcoholic beer or similar can provide variety.
- Note the quantity of fluids consumed. A template for recording fluid intake is available under Downloads at www.seniorenverpflegung.nrw
- Drinking alarms or clocks and other reminders can help you remember to drink regularly.
- Consider individual preferences for glasses and cups and offer coloured drinks and drinking vessels.
- Drinking cups with a nose cut-out or conical shape make it easier for people in need of care to drink, particularly those who have difficulty in swallowing.
- Sippy cups are not recommended for persons with swallowing difficulties. Beverages should be thickened if necessary.

Do you have any questions? Please contact the Vernetzungsstelle Seniorenernährung NRW (Network for Senior Nutrition in North Rhine-Westphalia): seniorenverpflegung@verbraucherzentrale.nrw or tel.: 0211 3809088

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