



Dehydration in Nursing Home Residents

What is Dehydration?

Dehydration occurs when your body does not have enough water and other fluids to carry out its normal functions.

What Causes Dehydration?

Dehydration can either be caused by increasing fluid loss in the body or decreasing fluid intake. Acute illness, medications or environmental factors, such as heat, may increase your fluid loss. Fluid intake may decrease because of reduced sense of thirst or difficulty swallowing. Fear of urinary incontinence may also cause you to drink less fluids to lower the risk of an accident. Dehydration can be a serious problem and affect your health. For instance, dehydration can lead to urinary tract infections. It can even be life-threatening.

What are Signs and Symptoms of Dehydration?

Common signs

- Decreased urine output
- Low blood pressure
- Constipation
- Change in mental status
- Confusion
- Abnormally rapid heart rate

Common Symptoms

- Thirst
- Dry, sticky mouth
- Cracked lips
- Feeling tired, weak

How Can Dehydration Be

Prevented?

What Nursing Home Staff Can Do

- Encourage you to drink liquids before and with meals.
- Assist you if you can't remember to drink or can't drink on your own.
- Encourage you to drink small amounts of fluids throughout the day.
- Keep fresh water at your bedside if appropriate.
- Find out what fluids and foods high in water content you like and when you prefer to eat and drink. Offer those foods and beverages to you at the preferred times.
- Track and review your fluid intake.
- Work with you to create a care plan that addresses hydration.

What You and/or Your Family Members Can Do

- Learn more about dehydration
- Inform staff about beverages/foods high in water content that you prefer
- Ask that the beverages/foods high in water content you like be part of the care plan
- Ask family to bring in your favorite beverages
- Let staff know how much fluid you drank during a family visit
- Be alert for signs/symptoms of dehydration and report them to staff
- For Family: Encourage your loved one to drink; offer beverages frequently while visiting.

Content was provided as part of a program funded by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality.