

Drinking and hydration for older adults

Practical advice to support you to drink well and
prevent dehydration

Key information

Dehydration is common in later life – **1 in 4 older people** are dehydrated.

To prevent dehydration, we should all drink at least 3½ pints (2 litres) of fluid every day. It doesn't have to be water, it could also be things like tea, coffee, juice, soup, milk, and fizzy drinks.



Advice to drink this amount each day is right for most people. Some people have health conditions that mean they have to restrict drinking, like heart or kidney failure. **If you have been told to restrict your fluid intake by a doctor, please do not increase how much you drink.**

Hydration Facts



Water is essential for life. It is central to every activity of the human body and is a major component of body fluids such as blood, tears, saliva and urine. It helps with circulation, swallowing, digestion, muscle and brain function and much more.



Fluid is vital. Without fluid intake, people can die within a few days, quicker than when they go without food!



When we become dehydrated, there is too little fluid in our cells. The cells in our brain, muscles, organs and skin work less well.

Why is dehydration more common as we get older?

- Thirst weakens as we get older, so we don't feel thirsty even when we need a drink. Drink even when you aren't thirsty!
- When we get older, our kidneys work less well and we lose more fluid when we wee. Even if your wee looks pale you may need to drink more.
- Medications like diuretics and laxatives also increase fluid loss.
- People may choose to drink less to reduce burden on carers and avoid visiting the toilet so often.
- Conditions like dementia mean that people may forget to drink (or misremember having drunk).
- Our muscles reduce as we age and cannot store as much fluid as they used to.

Being well hydrated helps us:

1

Think clearly and **prevent confusion.**

5

Ensure medications **work better.**

2

Prevent falls. Brain cells shrinking can cause dizziness, which can lead to falls.

6

Feel more **alert and energetic.**

3

Prevent constipation, by softening poo.

7

Stay out of hospital.

4

Prevent strokes, as it thins the blood.

8

Prevent infections. Dehydration makes it harder to fight all types of infections. including pneumonia.

Hot drinks to try



Tea



Coffee



Hot water



Hot Milk



Soup



Herbal tea



Horlicks
Ovaltine



Beef Tea
e.g. Bovril

Tips to help you drink well



Have drinks with family and friends and offer drinks to visitors. Drinking with others can be enjoyable and builds relationships.



Drink regularly throughout the day (before, during and after meals). Even if you drink small sips each time it all adds up. Drink more during activities and exercise.



Beers, ciders, ales, lager and alcohol free wines can be counted as some of your fluids. Other alcoholic drinks don't count towards your total fluid consumption!



Have a drink close by for when you need it, like a jug of water or a flask of coffee or tea.



Drink plenty when you take medication. Drinking helps with swallowing and helps medications to work effectively.



Don't let worries about the toilet stop you from drinking well. Give yourself time to get to the toilet and go to the toilet often.



Set reminders to help you remember to drink. This could be an alarm clock, a smartphone/watch reminder, or specialist drinks trackers and reminders can be downloaded to your phone.



Drink what you enjoy, or try something new. Stock up on your favourites.

To help me drink more I will try the following:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Hydration myth-busting

It is not *that* important to drink fluids

False! Becoming dehydrated affects our health and is a common cause of hospitalisation. It can cause infections, constipation, tiredness and risk of falling.

Tea and coffee are dehydrating

False! Tea and coffee help keep us hydrated! If you find that caffeinated drinks irritate your bladder, try decaffeinated tea and coffee instead.

I don't feel thirsty, so I'm drinking enough

False! When we get older, we often don't feel thirsty, even when we are dehydrated. It's important to drink often and keep hydrated.

I can't drink *that* much water

You don't have to! All fluid counts (apart from some alcohol) - tea and coffee, milk, soup, fruit juice, smoothies - not just water.

If I drink more fluids, I'll have to go to the toilet more

False! Not drinking enough can irritate the bladder, meaning you need to go more urgently and frequently. You might need the toilet more often after starting to drink more, but this will settle in a few days.





When you drink more you may find you need to visit the toilet more often too. That's positive, it means you're drinking well, but for some people, getting to the toilet more often causes problems.

Drinking and the toilet

If you sometimes cut down on drinking because of toilet worries then consider the following ways to help:

- Drinking more can help bladder control. Cutting down on drinks can irritate your bladder and make things worse!
- Avoid constipation (exercising and eating fruit and veg can help) and take your time when emptying your bladder.
- Wear comfortable, easy to remove clothes so you don't need to rush.
- Doing pelvic floor exercises can help with continence (see www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/womens-health/what-are-pelvic-floor-exercises/).
- Watch out for things like caffeine, sweeteners and smoking which may irritate your bladder.
- When you go somewhere new, check where the toilets are to ensure you know where to go. The UK toilet map can help: (www.toiletmap.org.uk/).

Further information.

- Your GP and the Norfolk Continence Service (01609 216021) offer advice and support. The NHS and Age UK also have useful information on their websites.
- A 'Drinking & the Toilet Leaflet' is available from Age UK Norwich at www.ageuknorwich.org.uk/advice or call 01603 496333.

What are your favourite mugs, cups and glasses? These are the ones you reach for first when you make a drink. Find out the amount of drink each favourite holds by:

1. Pour tap water into your cup, to the level you would usually fill it with drink
2. Tip the water into a kitchen measuring jug
3. Write down the amount of water that each holds below.

Favourite mug: ml / pints / fluid ounces

Favourite cup: ml / pints / fluid ounces

Favourite glass: ml / pints / fluid ounces

Other: ml / pints / fluid ounces

Cold drinks to try



Water



Flavoured water



Squash



Fizzy drinks



Milk



Juice



Iced tea /coffee



Barley water

Notes

If you have a health condition (such as diabetes) you may need to limit some of the choices above (aiming for sugar-free drinks for example). **Discuss this with your dietitian or health professional if you are not sure.**

How much did you drink yesterday?

How to fill in the table:

Think about what you did yesterday. Now, thinking through the day remember what you drank, from first thing in the morning onwards. Write it in below.

When	What I drank e.g. Tea, milk, water	How much? Big mug, small glass	Proportion drunk All, half quarter
When I woke up			
With breakfast			
After breakfast			
During morning			
With lunch			
After lunch			
Afternoon			
With evening meal			
After evening meal			
Before bed			
During the night			
Drinks with pills			
Total			

Now add up the amounts using the volumes of your favourite cups and pictures on the next page. **Did you drink at least 3½ pints?**

How much in that cup?

Remember to aim for:

Litres/millilitres: **At least 2l or 2000ml**

Pints: **At least 3½ pints**

Fluid ounces: **At least 70 fl oz**



Cup
100ml
0.2pt
4 fl oz



Can
330ml
0.4pt
8 fl oz



Mug
150ml
0.3pt
5 fl oz



Large coffee cup
470ml
0.8pt
17 fl oz



Small glass
180ml
0.3pt
6 fl oz



Bottle
500ml
0.9pt
18 fl oz



Glass
200ml
0.4pt
8 fl oz



Coffee cup
230ml
0.4pt
8 fl oz



Large glass
500ml
0.9pt
18 fl oz

My drinks plan

Keep this plan handy (perhaps in the kitchen/ on your cupboard door) and tick off drinks as you have them. Use a pencil, so you can rub it out and re-use the chart.

When	What I will drink Tea, coffee, milk, water	How much Big mug, small glass	M T W T F S S							
			M	T	W	T	F	S	S	
When I wake up			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
With breakfast			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
After breakfast			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
During morning			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
With lunch			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
After lunch			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
During afternoon			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
With evening meal			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
After evening meal			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Before bed			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
During the night			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drinks with pills			<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Example

Big mug (250ml)

Small glass (100ml)

Example

Mug of tea

Orange juice

To find out more please visit

www.ageuknorwich.org.uk/advice

Or visit UEA Hydrate

www.uea.ac.uk/groups-and-centres/uea-hydrate-group

Drinking plenty of fluid helps us all stay healthy. This leaflet will help you to drink enough. Enjoy!



Age UK Norwich has offered vital support and services to older people, their families and carers for over 75 years.

This includes Health Coaching. For more information, please visit the Age UK Norwich website.

01603 496333

www.ageuknorwich.org.uk



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This booklet was written by Oluseyi Florence Jimoh, Amy Zile, Diane Bunn and Lee Hooper (UEA Hydrate Group) in collaboration with older people undertaking coaching with Age UK Norwich & Age UK Norwich Health Coaches.



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