

Winter Water

Water is essential to good health. It helps your body:

- Regulate body temperature
- Lubricate joints
- Reduce work on the kidneys and liver by flushing out waste products
- Carry nutrients and oxygen to the cells
- Prevent constipation
- Protect organs and tissue
- Dissolve nutrients to make them accessible to the body

Dehydration occurs when you do not have enough water in your body to carry on normal functions. Studies show that one in three older adults may not get enough fluid. Older adults may become dehydrated for many reasons including decreased body weight is water (50% versus 60% when younger), kidneys may not function as efficiently, and decreased thirst sensation (may not recognize when thirsty). Changes in physical condition or decline in cognitive skills can also cause a decrease in fluid intake.

Signs and symptoms of dehydration can include excessive thirst, fatigue, headache, dry mouth, little or no urination, muscle weakness, dizziness, light-headedness, rapid weight loss, increased heart rate, low blood pressure, dry or sunken eyes, changes in mental status, fever, vomiting, and confusion. Lack of fluid sometimes is dangerous and even fatal. The human body cannot store fluid and must replace it every day.

Total fluid (water) needs are based on a person's body size and medical history. Every day you lose water through sweating (noticeable and unnoticeable), exhaling, urinating and bowel movements. Some medications, such as diuretics, and laxatives, can result in fluid loss. Patients with a fever also need more fluids. You need to replace this water by consuming beverages and food that contains water. Water needs vary from person to person, but most people need 6-12 cups/day (Institute of Medicine). In an average adult, food supplies 20% water, and 80% water comes from beverages of all kinds. Fruits and vegetables have high water content, along with foods such as soup, gelatin and pudding. Seniors should make a conscious effort to keep hydrated by including water with meals, between meals, and taking water breaks throughout the day.