

## DEHYDRATION in the ELDERLY

Dehydration in the elderly is common and occurs when the body loses too much fluid and electrolytes that are necessary to regulate body temperature.

Severe dehydration is a common reason for hospitalization and can be fatal, particularly in seniors with multiple co-morbidities that compromise heart and kidney function.

Unfortunately, dehydration is often difficult to detect until it reaches the moderate to severe stages. Low fluid intake is not the only cause of dehydration. Diuretic use, vomiting, diarrhea and infections can contribute to dehydration as well.

The main way to identify dehydration is thirst, but typically our elders no longer recognize that they are thirsty. Therefore, caregivers must carefully monitor individuals for dehydration.

### Signs & Symptoms of Mild to Moderate Dehydration

- Dry mouth, dry tongue, thick saliva
- Headaches
- Difficulty voiding, dark concentrated urine
- Dizziness when standing
- Weakness, cramping in arms and legs
- Sleepiness, malaise
- Dry, warm skin
- Fever, flushed face
- Constipation
- Irritability

### Treatment for Mild Dehydration

**Lots of fluids. The key is offering small amounts often.**

**Consuming foods and drinks high in potassium and sodium to restore electrolyte balance: broth and soups,, fruit juice, soft fruits, sports drinks like Gatorade.**

## **Signs & Symptoms of Mild to Moderate Dehydration**

- Deteriorating symptoms of moderate dehydration
- Poor skin turgor
- Decreased consciousness/confusion
- Lack of urine output
- Sunken eyes
- Rapid, faint pulse
- Hypotension, rapid respirations
- Convulsions
- Heart failure

## **Treatment for Moderate to Severe Dehydration**

- Severe dehydration is a medical emergency and hospitalization is often necessary.
- Intravenous fluids are required to correct dehydration at this stage along with oral intake.

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## **TIPS to AVOID DEHYDRATION**

**Provide 6-8 glasses of fluids** a day during extreme temperatures.

**Encourage drinking** by using small glasses of fluids served frequently.

**Avoid sun exposure or extremely warm rooms.** Check residents' room temperature, as many do not like air conditioning.

**Warn families** taking residents on outings to avoid sun exposure and extremely warm environments. Encourage them to offer fluids frequently.

**Add broths or soups (contain sodium); fruit juice, soft fruits, vegetables (contains potassium) as part of general diet**

Adapted from [caring-for-aging-parents.com](http://caring-for-aging-parents.com)

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**Courtesy SKILLED CARE PHARMACY 2011**