

# Healthy Eating: Fluids<sup>1</sup>

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## Why is water so important?

More than one-half of an adult human body weight is water. Water brings nutrients to the cells in our bodies and removes waste. Our bodies cannot function without an adequate water supply.

Water helps to:

- convert food into energy;
- regulate our body temperature;
- protect and cushion our vital organs; and
- keep us “regular.”

## What happens if we don't get enough water?

When we take in less water than we lose, our body becomes dehydrated. We lose water in urine, sweat, and feces. We replenish our body's water supply by drinking water and other fluids. Foods, especially fruits and vegetables, also provide our bodies with water.

Low fluid intake or dehydration can cause:

- difficulty swallowing;
- dry mouth due to low saliva production;
- headaches;
- fatigue;
- loss of appetite;
- dry eyes;
- muscle cramps; and/or
- kidney stones.

## Why is fluid intake a concern for older persons?

One-third of healthy persons 65 years or older have mild dehydration. These factors can cause dehydration in older adults:

- people not realizing they are thirsty;
- decreased ability to concentrate urine; and/or
- a self-imposed fluid restriction.

We need to drink enough water and other fluids to stay hydrated. Since older people may not realize they are thirsty, they may need to plan their fluid intake.

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## How much fluid should we drink?

The majority of older persons need to drink about 6–8 cups of fluid every day. The amount needed depends on:

- your body weight;
- activity level;
- your overall health; and
- air temperature.

These factors increase fluid needs:

- eating high-fiber foods or taking a fiber supplement;
- taking certain medications, especially diuretics (“water pills”);
- hot weather; and/or
- vigorous physical activity.

## What kinds of fluids are best?

Drink fluids that you enjoy, but limit those high in added sugars or sodium. Drink water and some of these drinks every day:

- fruit juices (100% juice, about 6 fluid ounces a day is enough);
- low-sodium vegetable juices;
- low-fat milk; and
- vegetable or milk-based soups.

## Tips for drinking more water

- Welcome the day with a cup of water.
- Drink a cup of water about ½ hour before meals.
- Drink a full glass of water when you take your medication. This is best for most medications, but check with your pharmacist.
- Drink 1–2 cups, or more if needed, of water during and after spending time outdoors.
- Fill a water bottle and carry it with you during the day.



Figure 1. Older adults may not get enough fluids in their diets, so it is important for them to plan their fluid intake throughout the day. Credits: Zoonar

## For More Information

*Speak with a registered dietitian (RD).* You can find an RD in your area through the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics at the organization’s toll-free number 1-800-877-1600 ext. 5000 (available in English or Spanish), or by visiting its website at <http://www.eatright.org>.

*Call your county Extension agent.* Look for “Cooperative Extension Service” in the blue pages of your telephone book; in Florida, find your county Extension office at the University of Florida IFAS Extension website: <http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/map/>.

## Other reliable websites:

- National Agricultural Library – <http://www.nutrition.gov>
- National Library of Medicine – <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/>
- U.S. Department of Agriculture – <http://www.cnpp.usda.gov/>