

## Assessing Fluid Intake For Older People

Older people are particularly vulnerable to dehydration because of age related changes in their physiology. Aging affects the thirst mechanism and so older people who are dehydrated do not experience thirst in the same way as younger people. Ageing also affects the ability of the kidney to concentrate urine so older people are less able to conserve fluid and become dehydrated more rapidly. However, signs such as loss of skin turgor are difficult to interpret because of age-related changes.

Nursing home staff or caregivers have a vital role to play in ensuring that old people receive adequate fluids and that risk factors for dehydration are identified and acted upon.

If an older person shows sign of dehydration, check the following:

- Is the older person drinking? He/she should have approximately eight cups of fluid a day.
- Does he/she have dysphagia (difficult swallowing) that require specialist of language and speech therapy team?
- Does he/she like the drinks being offered, and in appropriate temperature served and in appropriate cup?
- Is he/she confused and in need of supervision with eating and drinking?
- Is he/she forgetful and requires prompting to drink?
- Can he/she ask for a drink?
- Is he/she passing urine at least six times daily. Dark urine may be a sign of dehydration.
- Does he/she have an acute illness that will affect fluid intake, such as nausea and vomiting or diarrhea?
- Is he/she constipated? Constipation can be caused by inadequate fluid intake, while abdominal discomfort associated with constipation can lead to a desire to limit fluid intake.
- Is he/she taking medication that can cause or contribute to dehydration, such as diuretics to treat congestive heart failure.
- Is the environmental temperature hot? Fluid intake should be increased during spells of hot weather.
- Is there a record for his/her blood pressure measurement? If dehydration is suspected check if he or she is hypotensive or has symptoms of postural hypotension (dizziness when standing up).

### Reference:

Summarized from: Assessing Fluid Intake for Older People-Linda Nazarko, *Nursing Times Magazine*, 10 July 2007