

Have another drink: The importance of hydration



Hydration is a key component of maintaining a healthy body system. Last summer an increase in E. coli blood stream infections (BSIs) suggested that there may be a link between dehydration and increased numbers of urinary tract infections, which in turn led to higher numbers of E. coli BSIs. As summer rolls round again, we are raising awareness of the importance of hydration in preventing UTIs and BSIs, but also the wider benefits to the body. This week looks at hydration in general, and then we will look at the needs of two particularly vulnerable population groups – children and the elderly - and more about UTIs and Catheters in turn.

When we are born we are about 70% water, but this then decreases over time until we are about 55% when elderly. Good hydration can prevent conditions including constipation, headaches, fatigue, inability to concentrate, and in older people, falls, confusion, kidney stones and improved outcomes of hospital admissions.

Symptoms of dehydration include:

- Feeling thirsty and lightheaded
- A dry mouth
- Tiredness and confusion
- Dark coloured, strong smelling urine
- Passing urine less often than usual

Adult men need around 2000ml water intake a day from drinks. Women need 1600ml; if they are pregnant this goes up to 1900ml and if breastfeeding it goes up to 2400 to 2500 mls per day. These requirements go up if circumstances change, influenced by factors such as temperature, humidity and exercise (BDA, 2017).

The best way to assess how hydrated someone is to observe their urine in the toilet after they've passed urine is the best test for seeing how hydrated they are:



Healthy pee is 1 to 3, 4 to 8, you must hydrate

If they are 7 to 8 on the scale they are severely dehydrated and need to do something about it: encourage them to drink plenty of water hourly, if they can, and if no improvement, seek medical attention.

Some foods and medications can cause urine to turn a colour other than yellow. If a patient is concerned that their urine is an abnormal colour, check what they have eaten recently or if they have started taking any new medicines as part of their assessment.

Hydration in the workplace

It's not just patients who should be more aware of the benefits of good hydration – drinking enough water has benefits for employees, and their employers, too. There is evidence that attention, immediate memory, and psychomotor skills, as well as assessment of the subjective state, are most affected by dehydration (Adan, 2012) Being hydrated also increases alertness, reduces fatigue and can improve mental health and headache frequency (Natural Hydration Council, 2016).

Various barriers can exist to accessing sufficient drinks in the workplace. Firstly, is there easy access to water in the first place? Are employees able to leave their immediate work place to access the water? Is there air conditioning drying the air, or is the environment very warm, particularly during the summer? Thinking of primary care, where patients come thick and fast to their appointments, with very little time between them, often in buildings that become very hot during the summer – are staff members able to access sufficient fluids throughout the day? Encourage them to bring bottles of water which will hold larger quantities than one glass, and thermos cups to keep warm drinks warmer for longer until there is an opportunity to drink them.

Top tips for patients for hydrating

1. Start your day with a glass of water, or have a drink of water during the commute to work.
2. Bring a bottle of water with you to ensure that you have access to water throughout the day. This could be a big bottle to use as a gauge, or count up the number of times you fill up a small bottle, to track how much water you are consuming throughout the day.
3. If dehydration could affect your safety, or that of others, then don't risk it. Consider ways to improve access to water for you and your colleagues to make sure you keep well hydrated.
4. If you are feeling tired, have a headache or are experiencing any other signs of dehydration, try having a glass of water, as a first step.
5. If you suffer from low blood pressure, drink a glass of water 5 minutes before standing and this can help stabilise the blood pressure and prevent fainting.
6. 20-30% of our water needs comes from food such as soup, stews and some fruits and vegetables, including tomatoes, cucumbers, celery, strawberries, courgettes, lettuce and melons.
7. Replace water lost through sweat when exercising is replaced to maintain performance and health. Some athletes may find isotonic drinks useful.
8. All fluids count. Try flavoured squash, milk, milkshakes, smoothies, juices, jelly, soups and ice lollies.
9. Tea and coffee are great but aware of the amount of caffeine that they contain.
10. Regular fizzy and still drinks contain a lot of sugar so should be drunk in small amounts. Fruit juices do provide water and other nutrients but also contain sugar so only have one small service a day.
11. Aim to drink throughout the day. Have a tick sheet to record each time you drink a glass.
12. Alcohol dehydrates so be aware of how much you are consuming.

Next week we will look at children and their particular needs around hydration.

- Adan, a. (2012) **Cognitive Performance and Dehydration**, Journal of the American College of Nutrition, Vol. 31, No. 2, 71–78
- BDA (2017) Food Facts. www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts
- Natural Hydration Council. **Hydration in the Workplace** www.naturalhydrationcouncil.org.uk
- With thanks to Bracknell Forest Council for use of their urine colour chart.