



DEPARTMENT OF **PUBLIC HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES**

July 2025 Nutrition Article **The Importance of Hydration**

Hydration is crucial for older adults, and it is also important for everyone. Staying hydrated is a simple yet critical part of maintaining good health. Most people are NOT drinking the fluids they need every day, and recent research shows a whopping 75% of Americans are chronically dehydrated.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, chronic dehydration is a common condition in adults, particularly among vulnerable populations such as older adults and those with chronic diseases. Getting enough water every day is important for health and helps the body function normally. Dehydration can lead to various chronic illnesses and exacerbate existing health conditions, affecting multiple body systems.

Chronic dehydration occurs when the body consistently loses more fluids than it takes in over an extended period. This condition can result from various factors, but regardless of the cause, insufficient water intake prevents the body from functioning optimally. Chronic dehydration is a serious condition with long-term implications. It is especially common in older adults, making it essential to maintain adequate hydration to support overall health and to help prevent and manage chronic illnesses.

Water is an Essential Nutrient

Drinking water does more than just quench your thirst. Water is essential for nearly every bodily function and is a major component of the human body, accounting for 50 to 60% of total body weight. Nearly all your body's major systems depend on water to function and survive.

Fluid fills virtually every space in cells and between them. As the primary fluid in the body, water serves as a solvent for minerals, vitamins, proteins, and many other nutrients. Water also plays a crucial role in digestion, absorption, transportation, and the utilization of all the nutrients you obtain from food.

The body constantly loses water throughout the day through our bathroom habits, sweating, and even breathing. We don't get enough water from food alone – regardless of how healthy we eat – which is why it's so important to drink enough to prevent dehydration. It's even more important for older Americans to stay hydrated because, as we age, our kidneys lose some of their ability to concentrate urine, making us more susceptible to dehydration.

In addition, chronic dehydration can cause altered absorption of medications and nutrients, delirium, and imbalances that can leave older adults at risk for serious consequences. Adults 60 or older are at greater risk for dehydration and are more likely to take diuretics and other medications that cause additional fluid loss.

Health Risks Associated with Chronic Dehydration

Older adults are more susceptible to dehydration due to several factors, including decreased body water resulting from the natural aging process, a reduced thirst response that may hinder recognition of their fluid needs, and health conditions or medications that increase fluid loss.

Symptoms can often mimic other health issues, with physical signs including fatigue, weakness, dizziness, dry mouth, and muscle cramps. Cognitive symptoms may show up as confusion, irritability, or changes in mental status. These complications can increase the risk of falls, hospitalization, and overall decline in health.

Prevention Strategies

Staying hydrated is very important, but intentions are equally important if it's hard to create the habit of drinking enough water. It is essential to establish a habit of drinking water throughout the day and using the color of your urine (light yellow to clear) as an indicator of your proper hydration status. Setting reminders is a good way to get into practice. If you don't feel thirsty very often, consider setting reminders on your phone or using a timer.

Another suggestion is to drink a glass of water before or after your daily routine, such as before your coffee or before/after each meal. Another strategy is to buy water filters if the water from your tap tastes bad.

Many water filters can be attached to your tap, kept in your fridge, or used individually in a water bottle. Don't let the taste of your local water discourage you from drinking enough — there are plenty of options to improve it. Buying a reusable water bottle (or even a few) makes it easier to stay hydrated when you're on the go, whether at home or outside. These are just a few strategies to help increase your water intake.

How much do we need? The general rule of thumb is 64 ounces per day, but that will depend on a variety of factors — making thirst, dry mouth, and the color of your urine the most useful indicators. It's important to remember that water is an essential nutrient, so regardless of your desire to stay hydrated, the body's physiological need for water will always be more important.

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RECIPE OF THE MONTH

Easy Brown Rice Summer Salad

Whole grains are healthy! Make a swap of quality grains, and you won't taste the difference!

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup dry brown rice
- 2 ½ cups water or broth of your choice
- 6 oz cooked, diced chicken
- 1 cup chopped asparagus spears
- ½ cup cooked edamame (optional)
- ½ cup cooked peas
- 1 Tbsp chopped parsley
- 1 to 2 Tbsp lemon juice
- 1 to 2 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- Salt, pepper, and red pepper flakes (optional) to taste



INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Bring rice and water or broth to a boil. Let simmer with lid partially off for 45 minutes.
2. Let rice cool or refrigerate overnight.
3. Mix in chicken, asparagus, edamame, peas, and parsley.
4. Add lemon juice and olive oil. Add more if needed for taste.
5. Add salt, pepper, and red pepper flakes to taste.
6. Keep salad in the refrigerator as a snack or for a meal.