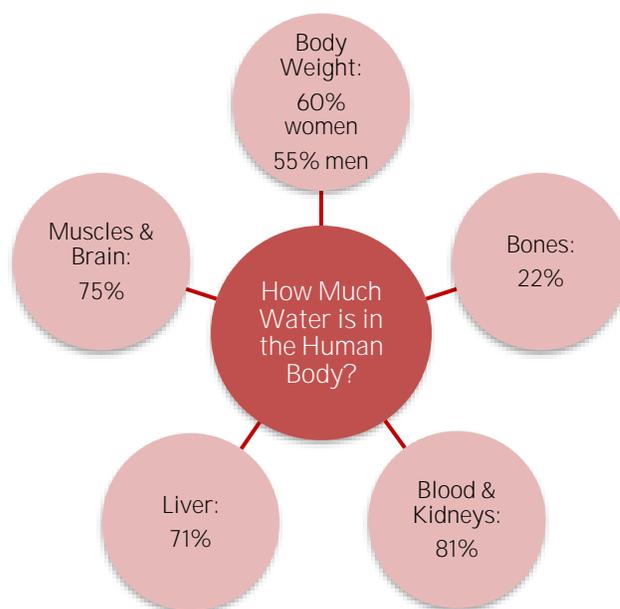


Hydration and Dehydration: Understanding the Importance of Fluids

How important is water and hydration?

- Water is a requirement for health and is essential for life
- **Water sustains the body's many vital chemical reactions and correct body functions**
- No other nutrient is more essential or is needed in such large amounts



What is dehydration?

Dehydration the state of insufficient water in the body to carry out necessary functions:

- Water lost is more than the amount of water taken in
- Dehydration is accompanied by electrolyte imbalances, especially sodium and potassium, which are vital to normal function of the organs
- Body functions such as breathing, urinating and perspiring all cause water loss that needs to be replaced daily
- Water lost and not replaced can result in serious health consequences

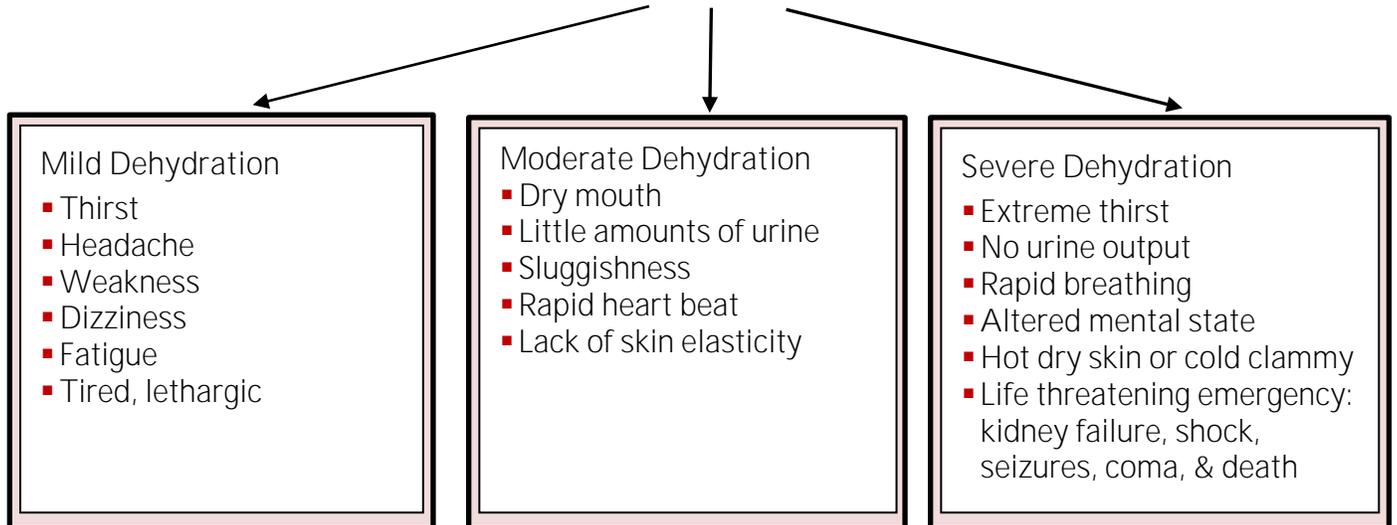
Dehydration and the elderly:

- As we age, body water content decreases and the risk for dehydration increases
- Dehydration is a frequent cause of hospitalization
- Dehydration is associated with impaired cognition (thinking) or confusion, falling, and constipation

What causes dehydration?

- Infections: diarrhea, vomiting, fever
- Urinary tract infection (UTI) medications, including diuretics
- Sweating, extreme heat, heavy clothes, exertion.
- Excessive urination: diabetes, diuretics
- Depression - Unable or unwilling to eat or drink: swallowing disorders, poor appetite, dementia

Consequences of Dehydration



Symptoms:

- Thirst
- Dark urine
- Refusal to drink fluids
- Infection (fever, vomiting, diarrhea, UTI)
- Loss of skin turgor (see picture on page 3)
- Hot, dry skin
- New onset confusion or decline in cognition (thinking)
- Dry mucous membranes (mouth, lips)

Why **don't** people always respond to thirst?

- Not knowing the benefits of fluid intake
- Not remembering to drink
- Dislike the taste of water
- Lack of thirst
- Lack of water availability
- Not wanting to go to the bathroom frequently

What is impaired thirst mechanism?

- Ability to feel thirst decreases with age and certain medications can affect the hormonal response that signals thirst
- With age, the body loses the thirst response to fluid loss, increasing risk of dehydration

Ways to improve hydration

- Teach loved ones the importance of drinking fluids
- Offer fluids at meal times and during activities, and give encouragement
- Provide fluids between meals
- Serve smaller amounts of fluid, but increase frequency of offer throughout the day
- Make sure fluids are available and easy to access
- Increase foods that have higher percentage of water:
 - Soups
 - Fruits
 - Vegetables

What do I do when an older person will not drink?

- Document fluid intake
- Notify the doctor if symptoms of dehydration or poor fluid intake are present
- Make sure that the food is easy to eat
- **Make sure loved one's** glasses or hearing aides are not the problem
- Make sure there are no mouth sores or teeth/denture concerns
- Be aware of medication side effects that may cause appetite problems or symptoms such as dry mouth or thirst
- Serve their favorite beverages
- Check food temperature: not too hot or cold
- Use adaptive devices such as sippy lids if necessary
- Smile and join them in a drink of water

How to check for loss of skin turgor:

