

- They may not recognise when they are thirsty
- People with memory impairment may forget to drink, or be unable to communicate their needs
- Living in a warm environment can cause more body water to be lost through sweat and breath
- It may be difficult to keep an accurate measure of an individual's fluid intake
- Medication such as laxatives, diuretics or hypnotics
- Other illnesses/infections e.g. diarrhoea and/or vomiting

Recognising the signs of dehydration

Start at the head and work downwards

- Headaches
- Tiredness
- Eyes may be sunken
- Sleepiness
- Dry mouth and tongue
- Cool hands
- Falls
- Urinating infrequently
- Dark/concentrated/smelly urine
- Urinary tract infection
- Constipation

Practical tips for colleagues and carers

- Many people prefer to drink little and often
- Offer water, squash or juice at mealtimes and at least hourly during the day

- Many people tend to drink all the water in their glass when swallowing tablets. Offering larger volumes at this time encourages people to drink more
- People may worry about toilet visits at night, so encourage fluid consumption earlier during the day
- Older people and those who are unwell can lose their thirst and taste
- Never take it for granted that they will know when they need to drink.

Acknowledgements:

- Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group
- Cardiff and Vale University Health Board

Contact details

Somerset CCG infection control team
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Continence Service
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Keeping hydrated

Preventing urinary tract infections



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Somerset hydration group

outstanding care
listening and leading
working together

Urinary tract infections (UTIs)

Urinary tract infections are the second most common cause for antibiotics being prescribed in the community.

The facts about urinary tract infections in older people

UTIs are caused by bacteria entering the bladder through the urethra and multiplying within the urine in the bladder. Bacteria may travel up to the kidneys through the ureters causing a kidney infection, which can lead to blood stream infections. These bacteria are usually the person's own bowel bacteria or may be introduced through the presence of a urinary catheter.

In older people the presence of bacteria in the urine does not always mean an infection is present. It is important to understand that the presence of bacteria in urine may be a normal finding in older people. Bacteria can live harmlessly in the bladder of older people without affecting them or causing any signs of infection (asymptomatic bacteriuria).

Signs and symptoms of urinary tract infections

A UTI in a person without a urinary catheter is defined as two or more of the following symptoms:

- Pain on passing urine (dysuria)
- Need to pass urine urgently (urgency)
- New or worsening urinary incontinence
- Need to pass urine more frequently (frequency)

- Visible blood in the urine (haematuria)
- Shivering and feeling cold accompanied by a temperature less than 36°C or above 38°C (rigors)
- New or worsening confusion or agitation
- Lower abdominal or back pain ('suprapubic pain' felt over the bladder, or 'flank pain' above the kidney area).

In people with a urinary catheter, the symptoms are different because the person is not passing urine for themselves. In people with a urinary catheter in place, a UTI is defined as one or more of the following symptoms:

- Shivering and feeling cold accompanied by a temperature less than 36°C or above 38°C (rigors)
- New pain or tenderness where the kidneys are (flank tenderness)
- New or worsening confusion or agitation.

Hydration

Good hydration can assist in preventing or treating ailments:

- Memory or concentration problems
- Management of diabetes
- Constipation
- Dizziness and confusion leading to falls
- Heart disease
- Poor oral health
- Kidney stones
- Low blood pressure
- Urinary tract infections and incontinence.

Dehydration

Dehydration occurs when the body excretes more fluid than it takes in. It leads to small volumes of urine being produced by the kidneys, which can become stale in the bladder over time, allowing harmful bacteria to multiply causing an infection. Keeping urine flowing through the bladder regularly is one of the main ways of protecting the body against infection. Recognising and preventing the signs of dehydration are key to reducing the risk of a UTI.

How much do we need to drink?

Many people need to be reminded to drink more fluids to maintain healthy hydration levels.

About 80% of our water comes from drinks and 20% is contained in our food. Most people need to drink 1.5-2 litres of fluids per day. An average glass of water is around 200ml. An average cup of tea is around 150ml. This equates to around 8 drinks per day but this assumes all of the drink is consumed which may not happen.

Reasons why people may become dehydrated

- Through becoming less mobile
- Not wanting to drink much fluid, to reduce the number of trips to the bathroom