



# Live Healthy Georgia

## Seniors Taking Charge

### Recognizing Dehydration

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It's that time of year again – hot, humid weather, difficulty staying cool even with air conditioning, and longing for the cooler days of fall (even though summer does not officially begin until June 20<sup>th</sup>). With hot weather comes the renewed importance of drinking enough fluids, especially water. For younger people, dehydration is uncomfortable, but most recover quickly. For the very young children and older adults, however, early signs of dehydration may go unnoticed – leading to the complications of more severe dehydration. Here is what you need to know to recognize and respond to the signs and symptoms of dehydration.

#### Signs and Symptoms of Dehydration



**Early symptoms** of dehydration often go unnoticed, especially in the elderly. Common early warning signs

include a dry, sticky mouth, headache, dizziness, constipation, or going for more than 8 hours without urinating. A lot of these symptoms may result from medications, as well. Thirst is also a common complaint. However, older adults often do not perceive their thirst as strongly, which means that they may not drink as much as they should.

Signs of severe dehydration include the following:

- extreme thirst
- dry skin, mouth, and mucous membranes
- sunken eyes
- lack of sweating
- lack of urination or passing dark colored urine
- low blood pressure, rapid heartbeat, and/or rapid breathing
- fever
- extreme confusion, irritability, or delirium



The last symptom is extremely important for an older person and their family members to recognize because it is often “chalked up” to senility or dementia.

**\*IMPORTANT:** If you or your loved one has any of the symptoms listed above, call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room immediately. Also, seek medical attention if an older adult:

- has severe diarrhea (with or without diarrhea or vomiting)
- has bloody stools
- has moderate diarrhea for three (3) or more days
- can't keep fluids down
- has any signs or symptoms of mild to moderate dehydration

## How Do I Treat Dehydration?

**Mild dehydration** can usually be treated by drinking more water or sports drinks, such as Gatorade®. Be careful drinking too many sports drinks, however, as they contain a lot of sugar and calories. Fruit juices, carbonated beverages, and coffee or tea are not good choices because they may act as diuretics or worsen diarrhea, if that is the cause of dehydration. Talk to your doctor if you have any questions about the best treatment for your mild dehydration.

**Moderate to severe dehydration** in older adults requires **medical** attention.

Treatment in the emergency room or hospital involves use of IV (intravenous) fluids that restore both water and electrolytes more rapidly than drinking alone can.



### **Important Advice**

If you have any medical condition, such as kidney disease, that makes you likely to become dehydrated or have hydration problems, talk to your doctor about what signs and symptoms you need to look for and what you should do to stay hydrated appropriately.



## How Can I Prevent Dehydration?

It's important to drink enough fluids throughout the day in order to prevent dehydration. Unfortunately, there is no magic formula to tell you how much to drink. So follow these rules:

1. Pay attention to your thirst – drink when you feel thirsty.
2. Be sure to eat fruits and vegetables – they contain water, too. Watermelon, strawberries, tomatoes, cucumbers, and spinach all contain more than 90% water.
3. Notice if your urine is darker than usual or smells strong – it may be a sign of dehydration. Drink more fluids.

### **Refreshing Fruit Spritzer**

4 oz. sparkling water, such as club soda or sparkling mineral water

4 oz. 100% fruit juice, such as cranberry or pomegranate

Mix sparkling water and fruit juice together and serve over ice. This is a cool, refreshing way to stay hydrated.

Source: Elaine Magee, MPH, RD.

<http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=50279>

### References

- Mayo Clinic. Dehydration. Available at <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/dehydration/DS00561>
- RealAge. How much water should you drink in a day? Available at <http://www.realage.com/food/how-much-water-do-you-really-need>
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### Pictures

- <http://www.doctortipster.com/6041-dehydration-causes.html>
- [http://nursingcrib.com/wp-content/uploads/dehydration\\_01.jpg?9d7bd4](http://nursingcrib.com/wp-content/uploads/dehydration_01.jpg?9d7bd4)
- [http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-qPELKfroq4/T1U\\_kwzv01/AAAAAAAAAvY/n4JD-Ds99As/s1600/drink+water2.jpg](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-qPELKfroq4/T1U_kwzv01/AAAAAAAAAvY/n4JD-Ds99As/s1600/drink+water2.jpg)
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