

Dehydration and the elderly

Why are the elderly at increased risk for dehydration?

- The elderly can dehydrate more quickly because their bodies have lower water content than younger people.
- Many symptoms of dehydration do not occur until significant fluid is lost.
- Dehydration among the elderly can be life-threatening because the symptoms of dehydration appear very quickly.
- Many elderly people do not feel thirsty when they are dehydrated. This is especially true in hot, humid weather, when they have a fever, are taking medications, or have vomiting and diarrhea.
- Dementia, depression, and motor impairments can make it difficult for the elderly to get fluids for themselves.

Normal Body Temperatures:

Measurement Method	Normal Temperature Range
Mouth	35.5 ° C to 37.5 ° C (95.9 ° F to 99.5 ° F)
Armpit	34.7 ° C to 37.3 ° C (94.5 ° F to 99.1 ° F)
Ear	35.8 ° C to 38 ° C (96.4 ° F to 100.4 ° F)

What are the signs of dehydration in the elderly?

- Confusion.
- Poor skin elasticity. Test the skin on the forehead and over the breastbone by gently pulling up or pinching and releasing a skin fold. Normal skin should resume a flat shape immediately. If the skin remains elevated for 3 seconds or more, the person may be dehydrated.
- Skin that feels warm and moist.
- Urinating (peeing) less often and in smaller amounts.
- Dark coloured urine.
- Constipation.
- Sunken eyes.
- Feeling light-headed and dizzy when standing after sitting or lying down.
- Racing heart (beating too quickly).
- Dryness in the mouth and nose, or cracked lips.
- Dry tongue that has visible cracks.

Avoiding dehydration:

The best way to avoid dehydration is to drink plenty of clear fluids every day. The **minimum** required fluid intake is 1,500 millilitres (6.34 cups) per day. The elderly should sip on water often throughout the day.

References:

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