



Avoiding Dehydration



Losing the sense of thirst is a common problem associated with aging. When coupled with dementia, the risk of dehydration increases. Certain medications (e.g. diuretics), alcohol and caffeinated beverages can also cause loss of extra fluids. Early on in the disease, memory loss means that the person with dementia will generally not remember when or what he/she drank last. Those with moderate dementia will generally forget how to get fluids for himself/herself. A person with more advanced dementia may not be able to recognize thirst or express the need for fluids. Furthermore, that individual will not be able to drink fluids independently and will rely on the caregiver to prompt him/her to drink.

Increased confusion and/or change in the person's usual behavior are likely to be the first symptoms encountered when the person is dehydrated. Other common symptoms of dehydration include increased fatigue and lethargy, complaints of muscle weakness or cramping, headache, dizziness, nausea and decreased urination. Urinary tract infections are much more likely to occur when a person is dehydrated, which will further add to confusion.

Monitoring fluid intake and making fluids available throughout the day becomes an important aspect of daily caregiving. Water in its purest form is by far the best way to avoid dehydration. Since tap water often has an unpleasant taste, bottled water may be a better alternative. Adding a flavor packet to water makes a nice alternative for those individuals who don't like drinking water. As a general rule, most people with dementia prefer sweet flavored drinks/food. Some additional ideas to promoting fluid intake include:

- Make sure each meal is accompanied by a 6-8 ounce beverage. This can include a decaffeinated drink, milk, juice, water, soda.
- Offer a favorite drink during the mid-morning and mid-afternoon. The person is more likely to drink the beverage if you join along.
- When providing medication, give a 4-6 ounce glass of water/fluid and encourage him/her to drink the entire glass.
- Incorporate foods into the diet that contain high amounts of water (see sidebar).
- Instead of asking, "Would you like a glass of water?" announce, "I brought you something good to drink!"

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Additional Suggestions For Adding Fluid to Daily Intake

Frozen treats:

- Popsicles
- Fudgesicles
- Frozen fruit bars
- Ice Cream
- Shakes
- Root beer Floats

Refrigerated Foods:

- Jell-O
- Yogurt
- Applesauce
- Juices
- Eggnog

Fruits:

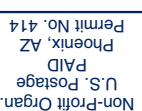
- Melons (90% water)
- Watermelon
- Cantaloupe
- Honeydew
- Grapefruit (91% water)
- Oranges
- Blueberries (91% water)
- Strawberries (92% water)
- Apples (84% water)

Vegetables:

- Lettuce (96% water)
- Zucchini (95% water)
- Spinach (92% water)
- Green beans
- Tomatoes (93% water)
- Carrots (84% water)

Warm foods:

- Broth-based soup
- Oatmeal
- Mashed potatoes (79% water)
- Hot chocolate
- Warm cider



(Avoiding Dehydration Continued)

- Leave a favorite beverage out in plain sight or by the person's chair so the person is likely to take sips throughout the day.
- When you are out and about, bring along a drink or stop at a drive through and treat yourself and the person to a favorite beverage.
- Be aware drinks that are either too hot or too cold may be refused by your person.

For those with more advanced dementia, the person will need frequent prompting to take sips of fluids throughout the day. This means that every 30 minutes or so, the caregiver will encourage the person to take a sip or two. Some caregivers find that using straws can also make accepting fluids much easier.

Learning to anticipate and meet the person's need for daily fluids will avoid dehydration; and likely keep you as the caregiver, hydrated as well.

Ask The Expert

Dr. Burke



Dear Dr. Burke:

I am caring for my dad in my home except for the three days/week that he attends day care. My dad needs to be on the move all the time so I am finding it hard to get him to sit at the table for meals. Also, while he used to stop by the sink and get a drink in the kitchen many times during the day, he rarely does this now. He spends much of his day outside walking in the backyard (which is secured) and the day care program tells me that he rarely sits down. I worry that he is not getting enough to eat or drink and I am worried that he is going to get dehydrated. When I ask him if he wants something to eat or drink, he usually tells me "No." Does he not realize he is hungry and thirsty, or does he just forget? What can I do?

Signed:
Caring Daughter

Dear Caring:

What you describe is not uncommon for many people with moderate dementia. Your dad is clearly most comfortable when he is on the move. So, even sitting at a table for a short time to eat a meal doesn't feel right to him. While he may feel hungry or thirsty, he may not understand what this means or be able to tell you what he needs, or he is likely to forget to tell you. It is important that your dad gets enough calories and fluids during the day. This may take some creativity on your part.

First, make a list of the fluids that he is most likely to drink. While water is the best choice, he may be more likely to drink juice that is tastier and contains more calories. Put the drink in a sports bottle that he can carry with him as he is more likely to take a drink. Throughout the day, approach your dad and say, "I brought you something yummy to drink!" A shake is a nice treat and you have endless possibilities as to what you can add using fruit, peanut butter, chocolate and even protein powder. The internet has a lot of recipes available and can give you endless ideas.

Think about favorite foods that he can eat while he is on the move. Make them readily available and in locations where he can see them and help himself. Readymade sandwiches such as peanut butter and jelly, fruit such as grapes, apples, berries, and cut melon, high calorie foods such as candy bars and cookies are often a good place to start. Take note of the foods he is likely to eat and begin to customize what you leave out for him each day.

Finally, communicate with the staff in the day care program to make sure they know your dad's preferences for both food and fluid. They too can let you know what they have observed with your dad in terms of his preferences. Keeping him comfortable while he is on the move with food and fluids will keep him happy, content, and minimize the risk for weight loss and dehydration.

Signed,
Dr. Burke

Our Mission

To end Alzheimer's disease without losing a generation, to set a new standard of care for patients and their families, and to forge a model of collaboration in biomedical research.

Tip on Brain Health

Five servings per day of fruits and vegetables are good for your brain health. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, blueberries, blackberries, cranberries, strawberries, spinach, raspberries, brussel sprouts, plums, broccoli, beets, avocados, oranges, red grapes, red bell peppers, cherries, and kiwis contain some of the highest antioxidant properties. They contain a higher percentage of water which will also help combat dehydration!

August Beacon Bits

New time for Adult Children Support Group – Beginning August 31st, this monthly support group will meet on the last Tuesday of each month from 5-6:30 p.m. in the BAI 3rd Floor Conference Room. Registration is not required.

Interested in Free Memory Screening? BAI will host the next screening on August 27th from 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. at the Via Linda Senior Center, 10440 E. Via Linda, Scottsdale, Arizona. The screening takes about 15 minutes and allows participants to ask additional questions about brain health and Alzheimer's disease. Call Veronica Ellis at (602) 839-6850 or email veronica.ellis@bannerhealth.com to schedule an appointment.

BAI will host the 7th annual conference on Alzheimer's disease/dementia in Native Americans on Friday, September 24, 2010 at the Radisson Fort McDowell Resort. This year's theme is "Weaving the Old with the New: Care across the Memory Spectrum." Stage specific disease information and strategies will be provided by an expert faculty at this full-day program. For more information or to register, please contact Rose Ann Barton at (602) 839-6918 or email roseann.barton@bannerhealth.com.

Musical Memories is back! This program helps you to create a customized CD of favorite songs for the person with memory loss. For more information or to schedule an appointment, call Veronica Ellis at (602) 839-6850.

This newsletter is made possible by the generous support of Banner Alzheimer's Foundation.

For more information visit BannerHealth.org/AlzFoundation or call (602) 747-GIVE