

Health on tap

10 essential elements to good hydration



1. Make tap water the main source of drinking water.

50 glasses costs around 1p. Unlike tea, coffee and juice, it contains no sugar, caffeine or salt, all of which can cause bladder irritation. If possible, install mains fed water coolers. You will always have clean, chilled water without having to order and lift heavy refill bottles. It is better for the environment and for budgets.

2. Devise and establish a regime and incorporate it into daily care routines.

Jugs of chilled, appetising water should be available 24 hours a day in residents' rooms. Monitor the use of water jugs in residents' rooms. Include this in fluid charts as they link directly to Care and Support Plans. Observe and act on low or nil intake. Encourage staff to drink water during their shift. This will serve as a reminder to check hydration requirements for those they care for. If staff feel dehydrated, chances are others may do so too. Provide refillable bottles and consider them as an alternative to disposable cups.

3. Ensure tap water is always an attractive option.

Make it an alternative drink during meal and refreshment times, served with ice, fruit or mint leaves. Introduce at least one additional refreshment break each day that offers only water. Hand or help people to a glass of water rather than ask if they want some.

4. Use visual prompts and reminders.

Put up posters, make badges and use reception areas to promote good hydration to visitors.

5. Match the drinking water regime to individual ability.

Ensure adaptive equipment and suitable drinking receptacles are available to those who cannot drink unaided. Do not exclude those who require thickening agents in beverages. Granules can and should be easily mixed with drinking water. Drink with dementia patients, the act of drinking will encourage them to do likewise.

6. Make this regime and its importance part of staff induction and training.

Share knowledge with colleagues and make sure any health benefits are noted and promoted. Use our DVD or devise presentations that can be shown to staff and residents

7. Encourage people to drink the entire glass of water with medication.

Good hydration is about preventing and combating symptoms of dehydration, such as constipation, which is distressing and painful. It is easier to administer regular drinking water than laxatives.

8. Address fears about toilet trips and reassure people it is not a problem.

This is often more a perception than reality. Expect one or two extra trips a day at the start of a regime. It settles to a normal and/or regular pattern. Residents should be assured that visiting the toilet more is not a problem to staff. Drinking more water can help reduce toilet trips. It increases the bladder's capacity to hold more fluid, and reduces its susceptibility to irritation and infection, creating a 'flush through' of the system.

9. Involve relatives, visitors and other organisations.

Promote the fact that you have adopted this Charter and explain the importance of drinking water. Display information and materials in reception, on your website and in your literature. Ask visitors to promote water to residents and encourage other organisations to get involved.

10. Hygiene

Remember that water is a food product and should not be stored for longer than 24 hours. As with all other good hygiene practice ensure the highest standards apply to drinking water.

