

DEHYDRATION

Dehydration means loss of fluids. Water accounts for about 60% of a man's weight and 50% of a woman's weight and it needs to be kept up to this percentage in order to maintain healthy body tissue. Because total body water decreases with age and the feeling of thirst diminishes, older people are predisposed to dehydration.

The possible complications of dehydration are blood pressure drop, shock and death from prolonged, severe dehydration.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF DEHYDRATION:

- Dry mouth and tongue.
- Decreased or lack of urination.
- Sunken eyes.
- Pale, cool and clammy skin.
- Dizziness, restlessness, confusion or coma.
- Low blood pressure.
- Severe thirst.
- Weak and rapid heart rate associated with blood pressure drop, shallow and hurried breathing.

CAUSES OF DEHYDRATION:

- Inadequate fluid intake: older people with decreased sense of thirst, swallowing difficulties, impaired ability to communicate, mobility, or cognitive problems may be predisposed to inadequate fluid intake.
- Excessive fluid losses: Severe vomiting or diarrhea from any cause, persistent high fever, heavy sweating, or taking drugs that deplete fluids and electrolytes, such as diuretics (water pills).

TREATMENT FOR DEHYDRATION:

- For minor dehydration, take frequent small amounts of clear liquids or electrolyte (such as diluted Gatorade). Large amounts may induce vomiting.
- For severe dehydration, hospitalization for intravenous fluids administration.
- Weigh daily at home and record the weight so as to be aware of fluid loss.
- In case of vomiting or diarrhea, keep a record of the number of episodes so one can estimate the fluid loss.