



Water and Healthy Ageing

Hydration Best Practice Toolkit for Care Homes

1 Introduction to the toolkit

Dear Colleague

I am delighted to provide you with a copy of this toolkit to encourage hydration best practice in the care of older people. This information has been produced by a team of health-based stakeholders to help you to protect the well being of your residents and staff and to promote healthy options in care.

Water is well known for its revitalising properties. Yet even though it is essential to health, it frequently gets overlooked as one of the six basic nutrients, along with carbohydrate, fats, vitamins, proteins and minerals. This can result in vulnerable individuals missing out on the support and guidance they need to help maintain a healthy level of hydration.

Strong evidence on drinking water

The medical evidence for good hydration in older people shows that it can assist in the management of diabetes and help prevent pressure ulcers, constipation, urinary infections and incontinence, kidney stones, heart disease, low blood pressure, cognitive impairment, falls, poor oral health, skin conditions and many other illnesses. Furthermore, dehydration has been shown to increase by two-fold the mortality of patients admitted to hospital with a stroke, and to increase the length of hospital stay for patients with community-acquired pneumonia.

Older people have a very similar water requirement to that of younger people. Their bodies require water constantly and all the important chemical reactions – such as the production of energy – take place in water.

Unfortunately, many older people do not drink adequate amounts of tap water. A conservative estimate for adults is that daily intake of fluids should not be less than 1.6 litres per day. A recent survey of water provision in UK care homes for older people, carried out by the Royal Society for the Promotion of Health, found that at best most residents only consumed 2 to 4 glass (480-960ml) a day.

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Future standards for care

As Care Standards now begin to recognise the clear benefits of hydration, it is likely that in the future care homes will be asked to ensure that fresh drinking water is available to residents throughout the day, free of charge. Carers can easily implement this in advance, as best practice. Clearly they have a vital role to play in supporting older, more dependent individuals in maintaining healthy levels of hydration. They can do this by ensuring that fresh tap water is made freely available and physically accessible day and night, as well as with meals. They should also be aware of an individual's need for water and encourage all residents to drink enough.

Total cost of care

Drinking tap water makes good economic sense for care homes on tight budgets. By helping to reduce incidences of some of the more common ailments, better hydration improves well being and can reduce the volumes of medicines that are required. It can also take away many hours of extra care time associated with illnesses and remove some of the higher cost of professional involvement needed to prescribe and administer treatment.

Research and taste tests have shown that where tap water is presented well and offered regularly, it will be drunk. As a primary nutrient, it will begin to play more of a role in nutritional care. Indeed, there are almost no conditions where water is not beneficial to the metabolism. As an alternative to less healthy options, it is the ideal solution.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pamela Taylor". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of each word being capitalized and prominent.

Pamela Taylor, Chief Executive, Water UK