



# WATER IS ESSENTIAL

By Ann Floden

To begin, seniors are especially at higher risk of dehydration, which can lead to medical complications. We lose water content in our body as we age, about 20% by age 80. It may be due to medications that are diuretics and require more fluids. Increased fiber intake, often recommended to aid with constipation, increases the need for water. Dehydration can be caused by chronic illnesses such as diabetes, dementia and kidney problems. Adults with memory problems may forget when and how much they drink. Diagnosis can be difficult as some symptoms are similar to illnesses.



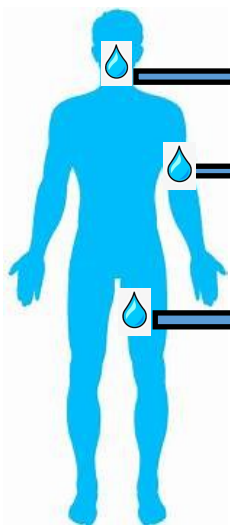
## So how much water do you need?

We have all heard that eight 8-ounces of fluids a day is recommended but another guide is one cup for every 20 pounds of weight. Factor in your medications, activity and environment (sweating due to heat or exercise). One way to make water more effective in preventing dehydration is to take electrolytes. They can be purchased in many stores as sports drinks, tablets, powders or a small squirt bottle (which is handy if traveling).

## How does the human body use water?

Water has four basic functions in the body: as a transportation vehicle, as a medium for chemical reactions, as a lubricant/shock absorber and as a temperature regulator. More substances dissolve in water than in any other fluid and then they are transported via blood to the body.

Here is a breakdown of how water works in your body:



- Regulates body temperature to maintain 98.6 degrees
- Composes 75% of the brain and 60% of body weight
- Helps with metabolism, a chemical process necessary to maintain life
- Helps carry nutrients and oxygen to the cells so they can function
- Makes up 22% of bones and 70 to 75% of muscles
- Eliminates toxins and waste products from the body
- Helps convert food to provide energy
- Makes up 83% of the body's blood
- Protects and cushions vital organs and joints
- Moistens oxygen for breathing and tissues in the eyes, nose and mouth



Obviously one needs to avoid dehydration and heat exhaustion. There are several long term effects on the body to consider; it weakens your immune system, affects heart health as dehydrated blood becomes thicker and restricts blood flow, increases risk of obesity when less water slows down metabolism and contributes to premature aging. Dehydration affects us in ways we recognize (thirst, dry mouth) but also in ways we might not think of (such as tiredness, crankiness, dry skin and constipation). If you feel thirsty, your body is already experiencing some degree of dehydration and starting to ration where its supply of water will go.

**Stay Tuned for Next Month: Water Sources/Storage**