

Hospital Hydration Best Practice Toolkit

6 Practical tips for encouraging water consumption

1. Start by encouraging your hospital team to develop a policy on how you will provide water and monitor intake for your patients. Consider nurses' understanding of the issue, and how to explain the benefits of good hydration.
2. To remind nurses to encourage water intake for those at higher risk, hang a picture of a drop of water in wards and near patients' beds.
3. Some people may need to be reminded, encouraged and even convinced to drink more water. Using a positive approach often helps. "Here is some nice cool refreshing water for you" is often more productive than "Do you want something to drink?"
4. Water is best served fresh and chilled – not left in open jugs.
5. Many people prefer to drink 'little and often'. Try to offer water at mealtimes and also between meals.
6. Patients tend to drink all the water in their glass when they are swallowing their tablets. Offering slightly larger volumes of water at this time encourages them to drink more.
7. Serve small quantities of water alongside coffee and tea and explain why it would be beneficial to drink more water.
8. Patients often worry about increased toilet visits in the night, so encourage water consumption from when the patients wake in the morning.
9. Older people and those who are unwell can lose their thirst response and their taste sensation. Never take it for granted that they will know when they need to drink.

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10. Where possible, inform families and friends about the importance of promoting hydration when they visit. They can help in meeting that important hydration target.
11. NHS procurement agreements already exist to provide hospitals with access to mains fed water coolers at competitively negotiated prices. Information is available from the NHS Supply Chain www.supplychain.nhs.uk
12. During the day, try serving glasses of cool water with slices of orange, lime, lemon and ice cubes. Make sure you keep refilling glasses, so patients can drink little and often. By providing citrus fruit with water, you are also helping the consumption of Vitamin C.
13. Hot water with a piece of fruit – such as lemon, lime or orange – can appeal to those who want a hot drink.
14. The Hospital Caterers Association have produced Healthcare, Food and Beverage Service Standards to guide hospitals. It advises that “free, fresh water should be available to hospital patients, staff and visitors throughout the day”.
15. NHS Quality Improvement Scotland (Food, Fluid and Nutritional Care in Hospitals) asks that where clinically appropriate, patients should have access to fresh drinking water at all times. Food and fluid should be provided to patients at the correct temperature and texture.
16. As the weather gets warmer, increase the availability of drinking water and encourage patients to drink more. Older people perspire more in warmer weather.
17. Offer water and fluids at all mealtimes. Make sure that those who are less able can choose to drink.
18. Identify those patients at risk of dehydration or those that require assistance with drinking, and monitor and record their fluid intake.
19. Think of an easy counting system to help those with mild memory problems, confusion or dementia to consume enough water.
20. Persevere! Helping people to recognise and choose healthy options will take time and patience.

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