

Hospital Hydration Best Practice Toolkit

1 Introduction to the toolkit

Dear Colleague

Water is essential to health, and is one of the six basic nutrients (along with carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, proteins and minerals), but is often overlooked. This can result in vulnerable individuals missing out on the support they need to help maintain a healthy level of hydration.

This toolkit has been developed to help protect the well-being and safety of patients by encouraging hydration best practice in the hospital environment. It provides practical advice on how to minimize the risk and potential harm that poor hydration can cause, and offers solutions to improving the provision of water to patients in hospitals

Strong evidence on drinking water

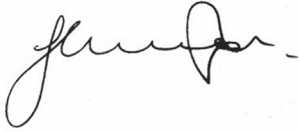
Evidence from the National Patient Safety Agency's (NPSA) National Reporting and Learning System has identified dehydration as a patient safety issue - medical evidence shows that good hydration can assist in the management of diabetes and help prevent pressure ulcers, constipation, urinary tract infections and incontinence, kidney stones, heart disease, low blood pressure, cognitive impairment, falls, poor oral health, skin conditions and many other illnesses.

A fundamental aspect of nutritional care

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) and the NPSA believe that if we are to make hydration a top priority, everybody in the hospital environment, from the catering staff through to the chief executive, needs to play a part. We are working with healthcare staff to continue to raise awareness of the importance of water and hydration to patient health, and ensure that the provision of water is a fundamental aspect of nutritional care.

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This toolkit, which builds on the RCN principles for Nutrition and Hydration, has been developed through partnership working with nurses, patient groups and key stakeholders. We hope that you find it useful, and would welcome your comments; please send these to www.rcn.org.uk/nutritionnow



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