

Staying Hydrated During Treatment

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Every cell in the body contains water. The earth is seventy-five percent water. Between 50-65 percent of an adult's body is made up of water. Did I mention that water is important? When we are well, our bodies tell us to take in water by making us feel thirsty. As we age, though, our thirst thermometer doesn't work as well, making elderly people more prone to a water shortage or dehydration. Someone who is experiencing vomiting and diarrhea as a result of their chemotherapy is easily at risk for dehydration.

When this fluid is balanced, it is spread throughout the proper places in the body and helps each organ function properly to carry out crucial processes. The human body can only tolerate moderate changes in the fluid balance so fluid losses from vomiting and diarrhea can upset the applecart. Dehydration occurs when our bodies lose more water than we take in. Along with the water balance problem, important electrolytes, like potassium and sodium, can also become too low. This imbalance can cause problems like nausea, confusion, trouble breathing, and heart malfunction. It will be important to replace fluid and sodium and potassium.

There is no clear research that tells us exactly how much fluid we need everyday but staying well hydrated is very important during chemotherapy treatment. Since you may not 'feel' thirsty, it is important to keep a cup or bottle of liquid nearby to remind yourself to sip throughout the day. Your goal is to have pale straw-colored urine. A darker color could mean you're not drinking enough. Check with your healthcare staff if your urine is off-color as some medications can cause this.

Getting enough fluid doesn't have to mean drinking plain water

all day. Beverages, soups, gelatin, ice pops and the water naturally in fruits and vegetables contribute to your daily needs. If you don't enjoy plain water, try adding lemon, lime or orange slices to your water or to sparkling water. Adding a powdered mix like lemonade may help if you prefer a tart flavor. Watch out for caffeine-containing beverages like some sodas, teas, or coffee as the caffeine can flush needed water from your body.

Symptoms of dehydration include dry mouth, thirst, dizziness, weakness, difficulty talking, weight loss, making little or no urine, decreased skin elasticity, fatigue and confusion. To control nausea and vomiting, doctors sometimes prescribe anti-nausea medication that can provide relief so that eating and drinking can improve. Drink an additional one half to one cup of fluids for every episode of vomiting. If your nausea and vomiting is severe, avoid eating for four to eight hours and then begin sips of clear liquids. You can start with one teaspoon every ten minutes and increase the amount to one tablespoon every 20 minutes, later doubling the amount in a gradual process. Below are some examples of clear liquids that can help replenish your body with needed water, sodium or potassium:

- Clear soup broth
- Gelatin dessert
- Fruit ice, popsicles
- Clear carbonated beverages
- Cranberry, apple juice (diluted)
- Decaffeinated tea
- Fruit punch, lemonade
- Sports drinks (purchased or homemade)
- Ice chips

Once you can keep down clear liquids, you can add "full" liquids (those you can't see through) like the examples here:

- All fruit juices
- Fruit nectars (peach, pear, apricot)
- Milk, milk shakes, soy milk
- Tomato and cream soups
- Custard, ice cream, pudding, yogurt

Liquid meal replacements

It is easy to under estimate the importance of getting enough fluids while you are receiving chemotherapy. If you are losing extra fluids due to vomiting or diarrhea, it is especially important to replace the water and minerals that were lost. Left is a recipe for a drink similar to a sports drink (like Gatorade) that you can make for yourself.