



VICTORIAN CONTINENCE RESOURCE CENTRE

# Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

## Q1. How can I get an older person to enjoy and ask for water?

- Presentation of tap water is important to help increase consumption.
- Assist the older person to make improved healthy choices by helping them to understand the benefits (see the *Practical tips for encouraging water consumption fact sheet*).

## Q2. How should I offer tap water to make it taste as good as possible?

- Taste tests have shown that tap water is enjoyed when it is provided fresh and cool (not too cold and not warm).
- Improve the taste of plain water by adding a flavoured ice cube, fresh mint or a slice of fruit. This lifts the visual as well as taste sensation.
- Tap water provided from water coolers becomes a feature, and allows water to be offered chilled or at room temperature.
- If offering cordials, make sure they are well diluted, fortified (eg with vitamin C) and sugar-free.

## Q3. What can I do if an older person insists on drinking mostly hot drinks?

- That's fine as long as they are drinking plenty of appropriate fluids.
- Promoting hot water with pieces of fruit in it works well.
- Try and avoid strong caffeinated drinks and offer caffeine-free as an alternative.

## Q4. Is tap water safe to drink?

- Yes. The mains tap water supply in most urban and regional areas is safe to drink and of high quality.
- Always make sure that the tap water you are providing is fresh from the mains and not from stored water tanks, where possible.
- If in doubt about the water quality in your building, always check with your local water company first, particularly in drought affected areas.

## Q5. Do I need to filter or treat tap water before I offer it to drink?

- No. The tap water is carefully monitored and tested and is supplied ready to drink straight from the tap.
- Sometimes filters will polish the taste slightly, but the same effect can normally be achieved by leaving the water to stand.
- Adding a little ice or chilling the water in the fridge will help take away any chlorine taste.

## Q6. How much water should an older person drink?

- Guidelines for adequate fluid intake among the frail older person suggest a minimum of 1500 mL of fluid per day.
- What we do know is that most people, especially older people, drink nowhere near that amount, and mild dehydration is very common.
- It is vital to encourage older people (and staff) to drink more.

For further information contact (03) 9816 8266 | 1300 220 871  
[info@continencevictoria.org.au](mailto:info@continencevictoria.org.au) | [www.continencevictoria.org.au](http://www.continencevictoria.org.au)

© Continence Foundation of Australia Victoria Branch Inc.

### Q7. Is it true that the colour of urine can be used as a guide to how much water to drink?

- As a general rule, urine colour is useful guide to good hydration.
- Urine that is plentiful, odourless and pale in colour generally indicates that a person is well hydrated.
- Dark, strong-smelling urine in small amounts could be a sign of dehydration.
- It is best to use this method only as a guide as some medicines and vitamins can change the colour of urine.

### Q8. If an older person drinks more water, will they have an increased toilet function?

- Yes, for a while, and that's a very positive change. Older people will use the toilet more often if they drink more.
- While there are perceived problems in the extra effort of going more often, there is also a lack of awareness of the serious ill-effects of not drinking enough and not going to the toilet enough.
- The older person can be embarrassed to make it known that they need to go to the toilet, but when shown the health facts, they can see that it can be more embarrassing and traumatic to suffer the effects of poor hydration, such as falls, bed-wetting, bedsores, urinary tract infections (UTIs) and many other conditions.

#### As a guide:

- Try not to provide late night drinks (after 6pm).
- Start drinking early in the day with a fresh glass of water.
- Promote the fact that water 'flushes through' the system and helps to prevent kidney stones, UTIs and constipation.
- Increased toilet function may also help reduce the need for medication.

### Q9. How do I provide for an older person who cannot serve themselves?

- Access to fresh tap water throughout the day should be provided so they can drink as often as they wish.
- This is especially important for those who cannot choose to serve themselves and those who have an impaired thirst response.

- The least mobile in particular should have access to healthy choices.

#### Ways to provide more options:

- Provide regular covered jugs of fresh tap water within reach at bedsides and tables.
- Have mains-fed water coolers at accessible heights.
- Offer water regularly.
- Provide individuals with their own water vessels.
- Provide dignified ways of drinking – often paper cups, plastic cups, drinking straws and larger sports bottles are unappealing.

### Q10. To save water, should I wait until the water jugs are empty before I offer more water?

- No. There are many ways to save water in any home or organisation, but hanging on to unappetising water is not one of them.
- Change the jugs regularly (at least three times a day – before each meal, and more if possible) so that drinking water is always available, appealing, fresh and cool.
- The left over water from the jugs can be put to excellent use in watering gardens, topping up vases of flowers and maintaining lawns.

### Q11. Is there proof that introducing positive hydration will benefit older persons and the organisation?

- Yes. Water is an essential nutrient and dehydration is frequent in the elderly.

#### There is evidence that improving water intake:

- reduces constipation and subsequent medication
- reduces confusion (with reduced risks of falls and fractures)
- reduces headaches
- reduces urinary tract infections
- improves skin integrity and reduces the risk of pressure sores
- improves blood pressure
- reduces consumption of unhealthy caffeine, alcohol, soft drinks and sparkling drinks