

Join us in looking at two critical health issues affecting seniors [View this email in your browser](#)



This month we are looking at a couple health issues that can be tied together. The summer heat can affect both dehydration and constipation. Remember to drink lots of fluids and eat lots of fruits, vegetables & whole grains.

Dehydration & Constipation

Dehydration

Dehydration means your body loses more fluid than it takes in, and therefore loses nutrients, like sodium and potassium, needed for normal functioning.

Anyone can dehydrate, especially during hot weather or after exercise. But elderly individuals and individuals with developmental disabilities may be at greater risk. Age reduces the body's water content, and disability can make it difficult to access or consume food or fluids. Dehydration is even more likely during illness, especially an illness that causes the loss of bodily fluids.

Common Signs and Symptoms of Dehydration

5. Dry mouth and tongue with thick saliva

5. Flushed face
5. Confusion (especially in older adults)
5. Sleepiness and difficulty waking up
6. Dry, warm skin
5. Dizziness
5. General weakness
5. Dark, concentrated urine
5. Few or no tears when crying
5. Headache
5. Decreased urination
5. Decreased skin elasticity (Skin, when pinched on the back of the hand, is slow going back into place.)

When dehydration is severe, symptoms can also include sunken eyes; low blood pressure; lack of sweating; or a rapid heartbeat. Severe dehydration can be a medical emergency!

To stay hydrated (or re-hydrate), have 8-10 glasses of fluid per day, throughout the day, and eat foods with high water content, such as fruits, vegetables, popsicles, Jell-O, diced fruit cups, apple sauce, and Italian ice. Avoid soda, which does not contain enough of the nutrients that facilitate hydration.

During hot weather, take water bottles along for outdoor activities, and use an air conditioner or fan indoors. Avoid environments with temperatures over 100 degrees F (37.8 C) without good air flow, especially indoors.

Constipation

Constipation means an individual has difficulty passing stool; the stool is hard, dry and often looks like marbles. The frequency of bowel movements varies greatly from person to person. Bowel movements are considered normal as long as the feces is soft, normal-sized, and is passed easily out of the bowel.

Factors That Place Individuals at Risk for Constipation

- Neuromuscular degenerative disorders that impair the central nervous system's response for the need to eliminate
- Spinal cord injuries or birth defects that affect neural responses needed for elimination such as spina bifida
- Individuals with muscle weakness who lack the strength and tone needed for adequate bowel function
- Diets that do not contain enough fiber and fluids
- Poor swallowing skills with aspiration risk making it difficult to eat and drink adequate amounts of fiber and fluid
- Inadequate or inconvenient access to bathroom
- Immobility and poor body alignment that does not allow for optimum positioning
- Poor toileting habits and routines or lack of privacy and time for toileting
- Medications that slow down gastric motility or draw too much fluid from the GI tract
- Hemorrhoids or other conditions that make bowel elimination painful
- History of frequent bowel stimulant use leading to decreased bowel reactivity
- Repression of the urge to defecate due to psychiatric issues

Review of Health History for Risk of Constipation

- Current or previous diagnosis
- Routine order for bowel medications and/or treatments

- PRN bowel medications
- Hospitalization or outpatient treatments for constipation, bowel impaction, obstruction or obstipation
- Takes medications that affect how hydrated the body is or that have constipating side effects
- Diet orders to increase fiber (prunes, brans, psyllium) without adequate fluid intake
- A constipation protocol
- Caregiver's documentation indicates that the individual complains of stomach discomfort, strains with elimination, has abdominal distention, makes frequent trips to the bathroom or engages in rectal digging
- Bowel record shows that the individual is passing hard feces or bowel movement more than 2-3 days apart
- Recent decrease or stopping of routine bowel medications

Signs and Symptoms of Constipation

- Spending a lot of time on the toilet
- Straining and grunting while passing stool
- Refusing to eat or drink
- Hard, small, dry feces
- Hard, protruding abdomen (usually an emergency)
- Vomiting digested food that smells like feces (is an emergency)
- Bloating and complaints of stomach discomfort

Constipation Interventions

- Dietitian consultation regarding the type of food, texture, fiber content and fluid requirements to enhance elimination
- Implement an individual constipation protocol and train caregivers

1. Constipation symptoms
2. What do to if they occur
3. Who to notify
4. Fluid requirements
5. When to give PRN bowel medications and how to document the results
6. When to toilet train the individual
7. How and where to document bowel movements
8. To report observations and/or data to the health care professional routinely and as needed

Guidelines on how to Prevent or Minimize

- Encourage physical activity to increase muscle strength and tone
- Positioning schedule for non-mobile individuals with time in an upright position. Consult physical therapist
- Review medication for side effects
- Establish toileting routines and schedule, for example: a) drinking warm beverage first thing in the morning, b) teaching slow, deep breathing to increase abdominal pressure during toileting, c) teaching person to respond to the natural urge to defecate, d) placing feet on a step stool while sitting on the toilet, e) providing enough time and privacy for toileting

RED FLAGS

- No bowel movement for more than three days
- Last two were hard and/or small
- Only small in the last three days

Need a health professional if

- Abdomen firm to touch and/or looks distended or bloated
- Complaints of stomach pain
- Vomiting without any fever or flu-like symptoms and/or vomiting material that smells fecal (call 9-1-1)
- Runny liquid stools after several days of passing small, hard stools, liquid stools or nothing

July Activity Tip

THEMED GROUP COLLAGE- "SUMMER TIME"

EQUIPMENT: A large roll of paper or tape pieces of paper together. Depending on how many participants will determine the size. Several magazines, scissors, glue sticks, glitter, stickers and magic makers/sharpies.

Objective:

- * **Concentration and focusing skills**
- * **socialization**
- * **the acquisition of craft skills**
- * **self - esteem and feelings of accomplishment**

Description: Begin by cutting out pictures that remind everyone of summer time. Trace hands of each individual on the paper. Have each individual "autograph" their name in or by the hand. Glue the summer time pictures around the hands. Individual can add color, stickers or glitter to the group collage. During the activity, have a discussion about summer time activities in the past as well as current summer activities.

During this activity, it is fun to provide summer time drinks; ice tea and lemonade.