

CARE Compass

Helping Navigate the Later Stages of Dementia



Hydration

 Sanders-Brown
Center on Aging

This project was made possible by a generous gift.

The goal of the program is to help provide tools and information so that you can navigate the later stages of dementia. We hope that you find these videos and resources to be helpful and encouraging.

This program is designed to be a guide only for the compassionate care and support of your loved one and is not medical advice. If you have questions or concerns, always check with your doctor.

We also want to acknowledge that late-stage dementia can look very different from person to person. Sometimes the ideas we share may not work or work for a short time. That is okay. No one person is alike, and what works today may not work tomorrow. We hope to provide tools that can be options for you to try.

This guide contains links and other resources that may not be provided by the presenter but are added to the guide to provide additional information and support.

Hydration and Dementia

What is Dehydration?

Dehydration occurs when the body loses more fluid than it takes in. Without enough water, the body cannot perform normal functions effectively, leading to an imbalance of essential fluids, salts, and sugars. Dehydration can negatively affect both physical health and cognitive

People living with dementia may experience challenges that make it difficult to stay hydrated, including:

1. Difficulty Recognizing Thirst

They may feel thirsty but may not recognize the sensation or understand that drinking fluids will relieve it.

2. Memory Loss

A person may forget to drink fluids throughout the day or may not remember that they have not had anything to drink.

3. Complex Tasks Become Difficult

Getting a drink requires multiple steps, such as locating a cup, operating the sink, or opening a beverage container. These tasks may become overwhelming.

4. Communication Changes

Individuals may have difficulty expressing their need for a drink or asking for assistance, causing their hydration needs to go unmet.

5. Disorientation

Even when a drink is visible, a person may not recognize it as theirs or understand that it is available for them to consume.

Signs of Dehydration

- Dry mouth or cracked lips
- Dark-colored or strong-smelling urine
- Decreased urination
- Fatigue, lethargy, or increased sleepiness
- Sudden increase in confusion beyond their usual baseline
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Rapid heart rate
- Constipation

- Poor skin turgor (skin remains "tent" after being gently pinched)

Hydration Tips for Care Partners

Encourage Drinking Naturally

Instead of repeatedly telling someone to drink, try inviting them to participate:

- "Let's make a toast!"
- "Cheers!"
- "Taste this and tell me what you think."
- "Can you help me finish this?"
- "Which one tastes better?"

Choose the Right Drinking Container

- Use familiar or favorite cups, such as a coffee mug, or a cup from a favorite restaurant.
- Consider adaptive cups such as Kennedy Cups or Nosey Cups
- Avoid containers that require multiple steps, hidden buttons, or complicated lids.

Keep Drinks Visible

- Place beverages directly within the person's line of sight.
- Avoid placing drinks off to the side or behind other objects.

Change the Taste of Water

- Add fruit, herbs, or flavor enhancers to water.
- Consider the taste, appearance, and aroma of beverages.

Offer Water-Rich Foods Hydration can come from foods as well as beverages:

- Fresh fruits and vegetables
- Soups and broths
- Popsicles and ice cream

Use Visual Cues

- Label cups with the person's name.
- Use simple written reminders or visual prompts when appropriate.

Provide Assistance While Encouraging Independence

- Support hand-over-hand drinking when needed.
- Encourage self-feeding and self-drinking whenever safely possible.

Use a Non-Confrontational Approach

- Avoid arguments or repeated demands to drink.
- Focus on gentle encouragement, environmental support, and positive cues.

Be Aware of Swallowing Difficulties (Dysphagia)

Signs may include:

- Coughing while drinking
- Frequent throat clearing
- Wet or gurgle voice during or after drinking

If these symptoms occur, consult a healthcare provider and request an evaluation from a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP).

Adaptive cups help promote independence, safety, and hydration by addressing challenges such as weak grip, tremors, swallowing difficulties, and limited mobility. Look for adaptive cups online or in medical supplies stores

Weak Grip, Arthritis, Tremors, Parkinson's

Two-handled cups, weighted/anti-tip cups, and ergonomic rotating-handle cups improve stability and reduce dropping or spilling.

Swallowing Difficulties (Dysphagia)

Controlled-flow and portion-control cups deliver measured sips to reduce choking and aspiration risk.

Limited Head & Neck Mobility

Nosey/cut-out cups and Flexi-Cut cups allow drinking without tilting the head backward.

Weak Suction or Oral Motor Difficulties

One-way straw systems keep liquid at the top of the straw, making drinking easier.

Severe Mobility Limitations

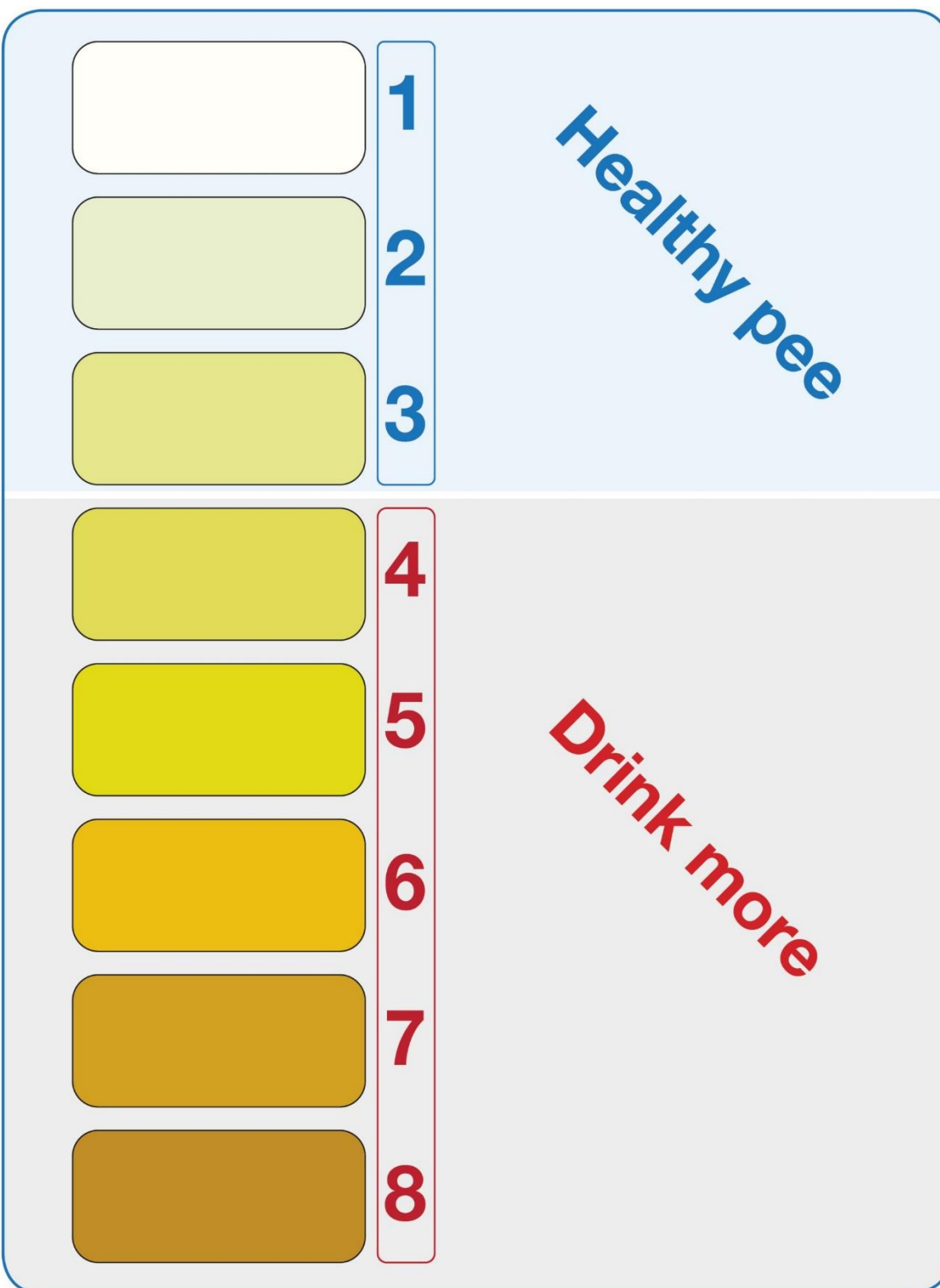
Hands-free drinking systems provide access to hydration from a bed, wheelchair, or chair.

Spill Prevention

Spill-proof mugs with secure lids and ergonomic handles minimize spills and improve confidence.

What are the signs and symptoms of dehydration?

Signs of dehydration are visible in your urine. Dark and strong smelling urine is a clear sign that you need to drink more fluids.



Websites With More Information

The website below is from Caregiver Action Network and reviews hydration essential hydration tips

<https://www.caregiveraction.org/dehydration-in-dementia/>

This AARP website talks about high water content food

<https://www.aarp.org/health/healthy-living/best-hydrating-foods/>

TIPS:

- ❖ Ask for a speech pathologist referral from the primary care provider to assist in finding the right adaptive devices that will ensure your loved one is safely hydrated
- ❖ Set drinking cups up in several places your loved one will be throughout the day. Next to the living room chair, on the kitchen table, etc.