

## **Dehydration in the Winter: Elderly At Risk**

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Dehydration is one of the most frequent causes of hospitalization among people over the age of 65. Worse, at least one study has found that about one-half of those hospitalized for dehydration died within a year of admission.

Older people are at greatest risk for dehydration because the mechanism that normally triggers thirst becomes less sensitive with age. In addition, as we age, a lower percentage of our body weight is water, so dehydration can occur more rapidly.

Those most vulnerable to dehydration include elderly people who live alone, especially when they are ill. In addition to fluid lost from fever from flu, or diarrhea from a stomach virus, sickness usually interferes with normal eating and drinking patterns. Beware of alcohol intake too. Alcoholic beverages increase risk of dehydration because the body requires additional water to metabolize alcohol.

Be aware of common symptoms of dehydration: fatigue, headache, dry nasal passages, dry, cracked lips and overall discomfort. Drinking at least 6 to 8 cups of liquid per day, part of which can come from fruit juices, milk, coffee and tea, is the best defense.