

Hy5 ~ Identifying dehydration in care home residents using the 5 senses



Does the resident's – legs, hands, forearms look dry? (flakes of skin can look grey, or ashy).
Some medications, including diuretics, and antihistamines, may dry out the skin.
Are they drowsy?
Do they have:
Few or no tears?
Low urine output which is more yellow/orange than normal?



Do they have a dry mouth, cracked lips, rough and dry tongue, and sores around the mouth?
Is eating and swallowing difficult?
Lack of salivation can make the tongue burn.
Saliva helps to taste and digest food.
A dry throat makes choking more common.
Is there increased thirst?
Are there food cravings for chocolate, a salty snack, or sweets?



Do they have bad breath?
Dehydration can prevent the body from making enough saliva.
Saliva flushes food particles from the teeth and washes acid away.



Does the resident's skin feel dry?
Dry skin is often felt more than it's seen.
Do the skin test
Using 2 fingers gently pinch the skin on the back of the hand and then let it go. The skin should spring back to its normal position in less than a couple of seconds.
If it takes longer they may be dehydrated.



Is the resident:
Confused, complaining of a headache?
Feeling dizzy?
Complaining of being itchy?
Do they have a dry mouth?
(makes it difficult to talk).

How dehydrated are they?

A quick way to test how well the resident is hydrated is to check the colour of their urine. Use this colour chart as a guide.



Preventing dehydration

Food

Swap dry snacks with prepared fresh/frozen fruit (melon, watermelon, strawberries, tomatoes).
Provide snacks of cut vegetables with a high water content – cucumber, celery, lettuce and leafy greens, courgettes, and peppers.
Eat yogurt or drink smoothies.
Aim to make half their plate fruit and vegetables.
Sip drinks during meals.

Drink

Offer a drink at least every half hour.
Increase cup size – using a sports bottle may be easier to hold for some residents.
Avoid alcohol, including beer and wine.
Consider flavoured ice lollipops and popsicles.
Have a drink handy – if the cup is nearby it is easier to sip without even realising it.
Adding fruit juice to water can make it more enjoyable to drink.
Try different flavoured teas.
Drink room temperature or cooler water.

Clothing in hot weather

Wearing one layer of lightweight, light-coloured clothing reduces the risk of dehydration.
Change into dry clothing as soon as possible if clothes get wet.

Activity

Active people get dehydrated quicker so make sure that the residents who walk a lot are hydrated.
Discourage activity if feeling dizzy, lightheaded, or very tired.

For more information

infectionprevention@lancashire.gov.uk

<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/professionals/professionals-in-adult-social-care/infection-prevention-and-control/>

Working together with

