

A Quiet Risk: Not Drinking Enough! (Continued)

Possible warning signs of dehydration may include:

- Dry mouth or dry lips.
- Unusual tiredness or weakness.
- Dizziness or unsteadiness.
- Headache.
- Increased confusion or irritability.
- Darker urine or less frequent urination.
- A noticeable decrease in normal activity.
- Difficulty concentrating.
- A change in the client's usual appearance or behavior.

These signs can have many different causes. Caregivers should never diagnose dehydration or assume that increasing fluids is always the correct response. Some clients have medical conditions or specific instructions that limit the type or amount of fluid they should consume.

The caregiver's role is to notice changes, provide assistance permitted by the care plan, and report concerns promptly.

Small actions can make an important difference. A caregiver may:

- Offer a permitted beverage with a meal or snack.
- Place the drink where the client can easily reach it.

- Open a bottle or container.
- Provide the client's preferred cup or straw when authorized.
- Give an appropriate reminder.
- Ask whether the client would prefer a permitted alternative to plain water.
- Observe whether the beverage is actually being consumed.

A full glass that remains untouched throughout the visit tells a different story from an empty one. Simply placing a drink in front of the client does not confirm that the client drank it.

Caregivers should also pay attention to patterns. Did the client refuse all beverages during the visit? Are several untouched drinks sitting around the home? Is the client complaining that drinking leads to too many trips to the bathroom? Does the client appear unable to handle the cup safely?

These observations should be communicated to the office. A brief and factual report can help identify a developing concern.

Caregivers should avoid pressuring, arguing with, or frightening a client. Statements such as "You have to drink this" may make the client more resistant. A respectful approach may be more effective: "Would you like some water or another permitted beverage with your lunch?"

Choice can make assistance feel less like an order and more like support.

The temperature and location of a beverage may also matter. Some clients prefer cold drinks, while others find them uncomfortable. Some may drink more when a beverage is served in a favorite cup or placed beside the chair they use most often. Caregivers should follow the care plan while paying attention to the client's reasonable preferences.

Never add ingredients, provide supplements, or offer a beverage that is not permitted. Do not make medical recommendations or change a client's dietary instructions. When uncertain, contact the office.

Dehydration is called a quiet risk because the early signs can be easy to overlook. A client may not say, "I am dehydrated." The first indication may be a subtle change in energy, balance, attention, or behavior.

Good caregiving means noticing those small changes before they become larger ones. Careful observation, respectful encouragement, and timely communication can help prevent a quiet concern from becoming a serious problem.