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Dehydration and Dementia Go "Hand in Hand"

Stephanie Highkin
Dementia Specialist, USA

Biography

Stephanie Highkin is a Nationally Certified Dementia Practitioner. She is the Founder of Hand in Hand with over 22 years experience supporting people living with dementia.



Her wealth of clinical, and hands on experience has influenced her Hand in Hand approach, philosophy, and practice. She holds many certifications to facilitate in Memory Care Communities as well as in Human Services, Palliative Car, essentialALZ from the Alzheimer's Association, Nursing Home Infection Preventionist from CDC, Respirator Safety Training from OSHA and Basic Life Support from the American Heart Association. She was also awarded the Aging Services Award of Excellence from Leading Age Connecticut.

Abstract

Dehydration preventive care is one of our most important concerns. Dehydration, the second cause of death among those living with dementia, is rampant. Weakness and dizziness often accompany dehydration and can make those living with dementia more prone to falls. Unfortunately, monitoring for signs of dehydration, especially if they are in a specialized care facility may go undetected, until it's too late. There are nationwide staffing issues that have not gone unnoticed by the healthcare industry. A recent article issued by Fitch Ratings [1] said the health care industry is facing long-term impacts, and organizations need to find sustainable solutions to offset the negative financial and operational impacts of not having enough skilled staff to provide acceptable patient care. There are simply not enough care partners and healthcare workers to care for People Living with Dementia (PLWD).

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As people with dementia age, they tend to eat fewer fresh fruits and vegetables, many due to texture and sensory issues. They may also not be aware that they require more fluids. In addition, if they suffer from mobility issues, they may also find it physically difficult to get to the kitchen, or not remember they are thirsty and need a beverage. Dehydration can also be exacerbated by other health issues, including incontinence, an illness that causes vomiting or diarrhea, and the side effects of certain medications. Many medications prescribed have a diuretic effect that reduces body fluid levels and contribute to dehydration. In some instances, dehydration may be the underlying cause, and the drugs to treat them worsen the situation, creating a vicious cycle that undermines the person's health.

It is important that care partners understand the importance of proper hydration and know how to optimize fluid intake. Sustainable solutions, Jelly Drops, brightly colored balls of H20 and electrolytes that look like tasty candies and the Hand in Hand glove are new innovative solutions to prevent dehydration and improving the overall quality of life for PLWD. Quality dehydration prevention care is now easier than ever.

Nursing homes and assisted living facilities rarely do enough to ensure residents' adequate fluid intake. In fact, a 2015 study published in the Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine [2] suggested these individuals may be in even greater danger of dehydration, especially if they require assistance and may not drink enough fluids on their own.

Poorly staffed facilities continue to fail to assess and attend to provide individual hydration needs. Staff may not recognize the importance of hydration, due to a lack of training on the part of management. Besides oxygen, water is the most essential element for sustaining life, yet many PLWD are chronically dehydrated. A healthy human body is made up of two-thirds to three-quarters water and the human brain is 80 percent water.

Good hydration is vital to the function of every system in our bodies. When you are chronically dehydrated, your body is forced to compensate in ways that can have long-term health effects. Because many of the symptoms of dehydration are shared with many other health conditions, PLWD may be misdiagnosed and mistreated with medications when all they really need is water.

Stephanie Highkin, NCDP, DPD

About Hand in Hand :

We share and educate worldwide about dementia so that everyone can have a better understanding of how to support those living with brain change in a more positive, meaningful, and respectful way to ehance their quality of live and those care partners involved.

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