



Kidney disease and fluid intake

This leaflet explains how your kidney health is linked to fluid intake.

What do I need to be more careful about how much fluid I have?

Normal kidneys are very responsive and can remove anything between ½ litre and 23 litres of fluid a day. Previously, you probably never needed to think about how much fluid you could drink. As your kidney function declines, the amount of urine that you produce may not change, but you will be less able to respond to large changes in fluid intake. We may talk to you about losing your ‘residual renal function’.

What is fluid overload?

Two thirds of your body is made up of salty water. When you are ‘fluid overloaded’, this is always a combination of salt and water. It is never due to water alone. Taking in more salt and fluid than can be removed by your kidneys will result in weight gain known as fluid overload. This is not the same as gaining flesh weight due to putting on body fat or muscle. Increases in weight due to salt and fluid overload can happen much more quickly than increases in flesh weight. Apart from your weight increasing, you may also notice that you are overloaded with fluid by pressing your thumb gently on to the inside of your ankle, (the doctors may have done this to you in clinic). If your thumb leaves a dent behind, it would suggest you have at least an extra two litres of fluid in your body.

What happens if I become overloaded with fluid?

Fluid overload in the short term can cause discomfort by swelling, especially in the feet and legs, as well as shortness of breath. The extra fluid will also cause a rise in your blood pressure. In the longer term, your heart may become enlarged, leading to heart problems in the future. High blood pressure can also cause kidney function to deteriorate more quickly.

What can be done to prevent this from happening?

- There are a number of things that can be done to stop this happening, the main one being more of prevention than a cure:
- If you are careful about how much liquid you consume (either by eating or drinking) then it is less likely that you will become fluid overloaded.
- You will have to limit the amount of salt (sodium) in your diet-or you will be unable to restrict your drinking.
- Take any medication (diuretics) that is prescribed to help your kidneys get rid of excess fluid (not suitable for everyone).
- Ensure you attend clinic appointments regularly to help us to monitor your fluid state

How much fluid should I drink?

When you were first diagnosed with a kidney problem, you may have been advised to 'drink plenty to flush your kidneys'. At the time, this may have been correct, but as your kidney function declines, the body's ability to regulate and get rid of excess fluid declines as well; therefore, you have to regulate it yourself by not drinking too much. How much is too much will be different for everyone and will probably change over time, depending on how much urine you are passing. A rough guide is 500mls more than your daily urine output. When calculating fluids, remember that many foods have a high fluid content. For example, sauces and gravy, milk puddings, jelly, ice cream and lollies, fruit and vegetables may contribute significant amounts of fluid to your overall intake so try to allow for these 'hidden fluids'.

How can I limit how much I drink?

There is no medical solution to help you limit your fluid intake but never get thirsty. There are some ways to help minimise thirst.

- Always use the same small cup (not a mug) that holds about 150mls/ ¼ pint, for drinks.
- Spread your fluid out through the day. 'Save' some for your vulnerable times of day.
- Avoid taking drinks with meals. Save them for between meals.
- Try to take drinks that will quench your thirst. Very sweet or salty drinks will not achieve this.
- Sip your drinks; try not to gulp them! Use a straw with cold drinks to slow you down.
- Suck small ice cubes if you are thirsty. Count each cube as 15mls/ 1 tablespoon. Try adding a little lemon/lime juice in each cube as this will help cleanse your mouth.
- Rinse your mouth out with cold water or mouthwash and then spit it out rather than swallow. This will help take the edge of your thirst.
- Chew sugar free gum or suck sugar free boiled sweets or mints to help stimulate saliva and stop your mouth feeling dry.
- Keep your intake of salt and salty foods as low as possible – this will help to reduce your thirst.
- Take your tablets with meals wherever possible to save on water.

Not everyone thinks in metric so here are some useful conversions:

1 litre	=	1000mls	=	1 ¾ pints	=	35 fl oz
¾ litre	=	750ml	=	1 1/3 pints	=	26 ½ fl oz
½ litre	=	500ml	=	9/10 pint	=	17 ½ fl oz
		568 ml	=	1 pint	=	20 fl oz
		284ml	=	½ pint	=	10 fl oz
		142ml	=	¼ pint	=	5 fl oz
1 ice cube	=	15ml	=	1 tablespoon		
1 scoop ice cream	=	60ml	=	4 tablespoons		

Contacting us

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Out of hours / Bank holidays – Victoria Renal Ward 0118 322 7476

To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

RBFT Department of Renal Medicine, February 2025

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