

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

7 December 2022

For immediate release

### **Keep Granny and Grandpa Cool This Summer**

#### **It's Easier Than You May Think**

With early summer here now and rising day-to-day temperatures, you may be wondering what the best way is to keep Granny and Grandpa cool this summer.

Help is at hand. We asked Sydney North Health Network's Dr Penny Burns, General Practitioner, and Disaster and Emergency consultant for tips on ways to your elderly summer cool.

Dr Burns explains Granny and Grandpa can keep cool through simple hydration. The drinking of regular drinks and eating regular foods over those hot summer days. Nothing special is needed. The key is the regular intake of fluids throughout the day.

Humans have roughly half our body weight in water. Every day we lose water through sweating, tears, urine, stools, and alike, so we need to replenish the fluids we lose daily throughout the day, regularly.

Unfortunately, elderly people have greater difficulty maintaining their temperature and their fluids. Elderly people's thirst mechanism and kidneys may not work as well as it once did, and their bodies hold slightly less water. The elderly are also more likely to be on medications that increase urine output such as diuretics, or that can affect their ability to adapt to high temperatures.

The result is dehydration, which increases the risk of kidney stones, mind confusion, and physical performance.

Generally, signs of dehydration are:

- dark urine,
- light-headedness especially on standing,
- dry mouth,
- increased heart rate, or
- increased breathing rate.

To counter the risk of dehydration Dr Burns says 'To keep your elderly relatives and friends well hydrated is simply a matter of making sure they have enough to drink and eat over the day. It's more about regularity of fluid intake over the day. Regular intake of drinks and foods helps keep fluid levels up and counteract any potential dehydration.

'Any fluid they wish to drink works. Water, tea or coffee, sports drinks, clear broths, ice blocks. Elderly people also need to have regular food, preferably with high fluid content including fruits and vegetables. And have just a little more than they usually drink depending on their activities and exposure to the heat.'

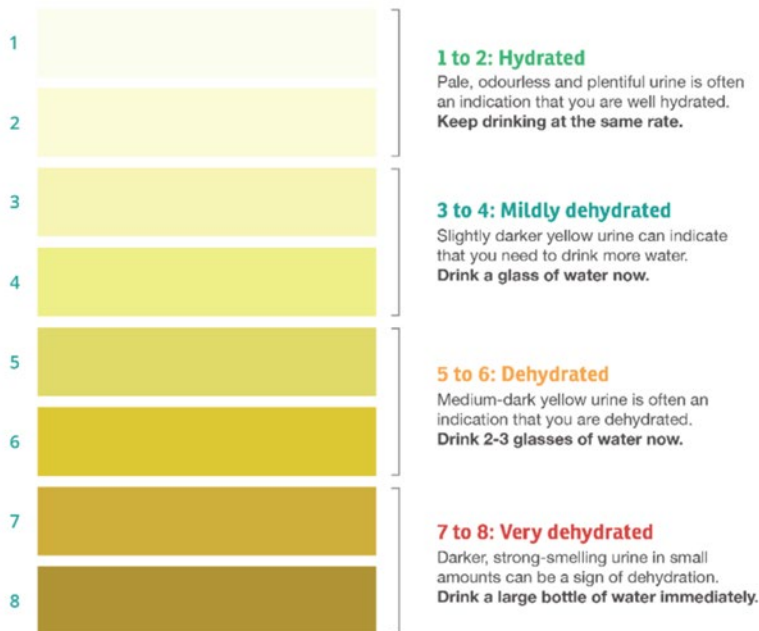
Dr Burns continued, 'One of the best ways to check for dehydration is through people's urine colour. Monitoring urine colour helps you and your elderly relatives/friends know if they are well hydrated. It's not about quantity of fluid but more about regularity of intake of drinks and foods.'

How do you know what urine colour is good or not so good?

Fortunately, NSW Health’s website contains a handy guide help you know if you or your loved ones are drinking enough fluids -



Use this urine colour chart to assess how hydrated you are. It is important to drink plenty of water every day to stay healthy.



You can find it here <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/beattheheat/Pages/urine-colour-chart.aspx>

Dr Burns informs predominantly it is through the colour of people’s urine that you can detect levels of dehydration, but you may also notice a poor level of urine output, that is, not going to the toilet very often, dry mucous membranes, or by people’s conscious state.

If your aged loved one is dehydrated, they may have low blood pressure, feel lightheaded when moving from lying or sitting position to standing, or have a faster heart rate or breathing rate. They may also be lethargic or irritable or disoriented, but this might be due to many other medical conditions as well. If that’s the case your elderly gran or pa should be reviewed promptly by a GP if this occurs.

Dr Burns says it’s good to note that sometimes medications such as some vitamins or some medical conditions may also darken urine. What and how much the elderly need to drink also depends on the heat and humidity, on their activities (exercising), on their medications and chronic conditions.

Other positive steps to help having a cool granny or grandpa this summer are keeping them as cool as possible during the heat of the day. This could be having them in an airconditioned house or room, cinema or theatre, shopping, or community centre. And if your elderly loved ones or friends are not physically present with you in a heat wave, it’s good to monitor their wellbeing by keeping in regular

contact with them, such as the phone or socialising and social activities are useful in promoting non-alcoholic drinking, such as getting our elderly into airconditioned cafes, libraries, museums, or art galleries, or into shady water and park areas. Areas where they can stay cool. Research has shown having an air conditioner in the bedroom reduces their risk during hot weather.

Helping your elderly relatives and friends know they have ready access to a bathroom, so they aren't discouraged from drinking. The easier access the better, for their peace of mind.

Having a cool Granny or Grandpa during summer's heat is as simple as making sure they are drinking fluids and eating regularly. Share the NSW Health chart with your relatives and friends. Dr Burns is confident they too will want a cool Granny or Grandpa this summer.

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

#### **Further tips from Dr Burns on how you can keep elderly people cool in summer's heat:**

- Encourage the elderly to cool their homes including using their oven and stove minimally.
- Check in with the elderly daily.
- If there is smoke about, keep windows and doors closed. If there is no smoke about, once the heat of the day has passed, open windows and doors to allow cool air to cool down the house.
- Hot weather can be tiring so encourage them to rest more and avoid over exertion. They may not be able to do as much as they usually can when the weather is cooler. They should be cautious about doing activities especially during the hotter parts of the day.
- Remember there can also be a risk of over drinking (and hyponatremia). This can cause lethargy and confusion as well.

Some medications can predispose to heat illness by altering an elderly person's ability to thermoregulate. When prescribed medications remember to ask your GP about any effects from heat, including diuretics, antihistamines, and antidepressants. For example, some medications can affect the ability to sweat, some may affect kidney function, some may be affected by a decreased awareness of the heat

If you suspect overhydration or underhydration in your aged, loved ones then it is important for Gran or Pa to see a General Practitioner. The GP will check this with a blood test

#### **For further information on how weather events and your health interact see**

<https://sydneynorthhealthnetwork.org.au/weather-events-and-your-health/>

#### **ABOUT: Sydney North Health Network <https://sydneynorthhealthnetwork.org.au/>**

The Northern Sydney Primary Health Network, operated by the Sydney North Health Network – a not-for-profit organisation – is one of 31 Primary Health Networks (PHNs) established by the Australian Government to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of medical services for the community. Our focus is on patients who are at risk of poor health outcomes. We work to improve the coordination of their care, so they receive the right care, in the right place, at the right time.

### **MEDIA ENQUIRIES**

**SNHN Dr Penny Burns, General Practitioner, and Disaster and Emergency consultant** is available for interview

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