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Dehydration in an older adult Initial assessment

Nursing Foundation | Initial assessment

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Fictional educational example. Individualize using verified patient findings, authorized treatment and current local protocols. No real patient record or observed outcome is claimed.

Clinical assessment

Subjective: Thirst, dizziness on standing and drinking less than usual.

Objective findings and required checks: Dry mouth, reduced urine and postural symptoms; requires supervised assessment.

Physical examination and investigations: Review intake/output, weight, lying/standing observations when safe, renal function and electrolytes.

Supply actual values, units, timing and trends during supervised application. Do not invent missing clinical data.

Clinical focus and pathophysiology

Dehydration in an older adult: Reduced intake and age-related vulnerability can lower circulating volume and disturb electrolytes.

Medical / surgical management

Assess circulation and swallowing; provide oral or prescribed intravenous replacement with frequent review.

Illustrative drug and treatment study

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Medicine / treatment	Purpose	Nursing checks
Prescribed crystalloid	Replace fluid when oral intake is insufficient or unsafe	Monitor circulation, lung findings, urine and electrolyte trends
oral rehydration solution	Replace suitable oral losses	Prepare correctly and follow the individualized plan.

Treatment examples are not a prescription. Verify the authorized product, dose, route, timing, contraindications and current local product information.

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Nursing care plan

Nursing diagnoses use original clinical problem wording. They are not the licensed NANDA-I classification. Verify any formal label or code against your institution's licensed current edition; select actual or risk diagnoses only when supported by assessment.

Context task: Establish the immediate clinical priorities and verify the baseline before assuming a diagnosis.

Set individualized measurable targets and an exact review time. Select actual or risk statements only when supported by assessment.

Assessment: subjective / objective	Nursing diagnosis: original problem wording	Short- and longer-term goals	Nursing interventions with rationale	Evaluation
Ask: Ask about thirst, intake, vomiting, stools and dizziness. Assess: Monitor weight trend, intake/output, mucosa, circulation and relevant electrolytes.	Insufficient fluid replacement for current losses. Possible factors: intake below requirements or increased fluid loss. Validate against the patient's assessment.	Short-term: After the first indicated intervention, at the documented review time: Hydration and circulation improve within the agreed reassessment interval. Longer-term: Before the clinically approved transition or agreed follow-up: Patient or caregiver explains the individualized fluid plan and warning signs.	1. Measure intake and losses using age-appropriate methods. Rationale: Accurate trends guide replacement and help prevent overcorrection. 2. Offer oral fluids only when swallowing, consciousness and the treatment plan permit; otherwise implement prescribed replacement. Rationale: The safest route depends on aspiration risk and clinical severity. 3. Reassess perfusion, weight and laboratory trends after prescribed replacement. Rationale: Both continued dehydration and fluid overload require prompt recognition. 4. Assess circulation and swallowing; provide oral or prescribed intravenous replacement with frequent review. Rationale: Reduced intake and age-related vulnerability can lower circulating volume and disturb electrolytes. The condition-specific plan addresses the underlying problem while response is monitored.	Record the baseline and reassessed finding, the time and whether this goal is met, partly met or not met. If not met, reassess causes and revise or escalate. Do not record an unobserved improvement.

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Assessment: subjective / objective	Nursing diagnosis: original problem wording	Short- and longer-term goals	Nursing interventions with rationale	Evaluation
Ask: Ask about falls, dizziness, vision and usual walking aids. Assess: Assess gait, medicines, cognition and environmental risks.	Vulnerability to a fall or accidental injury. Possible factors: unsteady mobility, dizziness or environmental hazards. Validate against the patient's assessment.	Short-term: After the first indicated intervention, at the documented review time: Transfers and essential activity occur without a fall during the care period. Longer-term: Before the clinically approved transition or agreed follow-up: Demonstrates safe use of assistance and identifies home hazards.	1. Individualize fall precautions and keep necessary items and the call bell accessible. Rationale: Accessible support reduces unsafe unassisted movement. 2. Supervise transfers according to assessed need and check footwear and aids. Rationale: Correct assistance and equipment improve stability. 3. Review reversible contributors with the team, including postural symptoms and medicines. Rationale: Addressing causes improves safety beyond environmental measures.	Record the baseline and reassessed finding, the time and whether this goal is met, partly met or not met. If not met, reassess causes and revise or escalate. Do not record an unobserved improvement.
Ask: Ask which activities the person can do and where help is wanted. Assess: Assess personal-care tasks, cognition, mobility and available support.	Daily self-care needs exceed current ability. Possible factors: weakness, symptoms or reduced confidence. Validate against the patient's assessment.	Short-term: After the first indicated intervention, at the documented review time: Completes a chosen self-care activity with the agreed level of assistance. Longer-term: Before the clinically approved transition or agreed follow-up: Patient or caregiver demonstrates essential care skills and knows support options.	1. Assess ability task by task and respect preferences and privacy. Rationale: Specific assessment prevents unnecessary dependence. 2. Provide only the assistance required and use suitable aids. Rationale: Supported participation protects dignity and builds independence. 3. Teach caregivers with consent and confirm realistic support at home. Rationale: Continuity depends on available skills and resources.	Record the baseline and reassessed finding, the time and whether this goal is met, partly met or not met. If not met, reassess causes and revise or escalate. Do not record an unobserved improvement.
Ask: Ask what the learner already knows and wants to understand. Assess:	Learning needs about the condition and care plan. Possible factors: new	Short-term: After the first indicated intervention, at the documented review time:	1. Assess language, literacy, hearing, vision and preferred learning method. Rationale: Accessible teaching improves understanding. 2. Teach a few	Record the baseline and reassessed finding, the time

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Assessment: subjective / objective	Nursing diagnosis: original problem wording	Short- and longer-term goals	Nursing interventions with rationale	Evaluation
Use teach-back or demonstration to identify specific gaps.	information, complex treatment or limited prior teaching. Validate against the patient's assessment.	Explains the most important immediate action in their own words. Longer-term: Before the clinically approved transition or agreed follow-up: Demonstrates the agreed care skills and names follow-up and warning signs.	condition-specific points using plain language and demonstration. Rationale: Focused information is easier to retain and apply. 3. Use teach-back, correct misunderstandings and provide an accessible written plan. Rationale: Checking understanding supports safer self-management. 4. Plan accessible drinks if permitted, assistance with intake and early review for recurrent symptoms. Rationale: Condition-specific teaching connects the treatment plan to safe continuing care.	and whether this goal is met, partly met or not met. If not met, reassess causes and revise or escalate. Do not record an unobserved improvement.

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Health education and continuing care

Plan accessible drinks if permitted, assistance with intake and early review for recurrent symptoms.

Transition only after clinical readiness is confirmed. Reconcile medicines, check access and caregiver support, and document who will review the patient and when.

Urgent warning signs

Urgent review for confusion, fainting, very low urine output or shock.

Evaluation and conclusion

For each goal, document met, partly met or not met using observed evidence and the review time. Reassess and revise if progress is inadequate. Individual assessment, prioritized care and coordinated review guide this topic.

Quick Revision

- Reduced intake and age-related vulnerability can lower circulating volume and disturb electrolytes.

- Priority concerns: Insufficient fluid replacement for current losses; Vulnerability to a fall or accidental injury; Daily self-care needs exceed current ability; Learning needs about the condition and care plan.

- Urgent review for confusion, fainting, very low urine output or shock.

- Plan accessible drinks if permitted, assistance with intake and early review for recurrent symptoms.

Exam / viva: Which finding changes the order of priorities, and what must be escalated immediately?

References

Nursing Fundamentals, 2e - Ernstmeyer & Christman (editors), Open RN / WisTech Open, 2024
https://wtcs.pressbooks.pub/nursingfundamentals/

Nursing Pharmacology, 2e - Ernstmeyer & Christman (editors), Open RN / WisTech Open, 2023
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https://www.indiannursingcouncil.org/gazette-notification

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