

Better Nutrition

July

Off The Shelf

Hydrate for Good Health

By Karolyn A. Gazella, co-author of the *Definitive Guide to Cancer: An Integrative Approach to Prevention, Treatment, and Healing*

It's a hot summer's day and you're thirsty—very thirsty. Just drink a glass of water and the problem is solved, right? Not so fast. According to the president of the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM), W. Larry Kenney, PhD, "...thirst alone is not the best indicator of dehydration or the body's fluid needs."

When we drink to simply quench our thirst, we are not satisfying our total fluid needs. "Unfortunately, our brain signals us after it is too late," according to Dr. Susan Ryan, an emergency room physician in Denver, CO. According to Dr. Ryan, "most people don't drink enough water and therefore are not operating at peak efficiency."

Importance of Hydration

The human body is made up of approximately two-thirds water. About 75 percent of the brain is water, 75 percent of muscle, and more than 90 percent of blood. As a result, nearly every body function depends on water. Water helps:

- transport oxygen and nutrients to our cells
- regulate body temperature
- lubricate and cushion joints and key organs
- remove toxic wastes

Brain function, immunity, and elimination all rely on water. Water even helps us breathe. Having youthful skin also requires proper hydration.

"Dehydrated skin is a common problem," explains Myra Eby, President and Founder of MyChelle Dermaceuticals, a manufacturer of non-toxic skin care products, located in Frisco, CO. "A key cause of aging skin is lack of moisture. In order to have supple, soft skin, you need to drink plenty of fresh water frequently throughout the day."

Water is especially beneficial to weekend warriors, exercisers, and athletes. According to Dr. Ryan, studies demonstrate that as little as two percent dehydration has been shown to significantly decrease athletic performance. "I have found that even sedentary people have improved vitality after they increase their daily water intake," she explains.

According to Dr. Ryan, symptoms of dehydration include fatigue, mild nausea, headaches, and dizziness. "In more profound states, we see weakness, increased heart rate, or serious confusion," she explains. "Children, the elderly, people who exercise, and people living in hot, humid climates may have a greater risk of dehydration." One of the best ways to tell if you are dehydrated is by the color of your urine. As a general rule, a well-hydrated body excretes lightly colored urine.

Staying Hydrated

About 80% of our fluids come from water and other beverages and the other 20% comes from food. Many fruits and vegetables are good sources of fluids including watermelon, oranges, cucumbers, and lettuce.

In 2004, the National Academy of Sciences reported that men need about 125 ounces and women need about 91 ounces of fluids each day. However, fluid needs are dependent upon many factors. For example, a 150-pound person who walks 30 minutes a day at a medium pace (about 4 miles per hour) should drink 84 ounces. If that same person walks for 60 minutes, they need 93 ounces.

To quickly calculate your hydration needs, simply divide your body weight in half and that will be the number of ounces you need each day. For every 20 minutes of exercise, add eight ounces to that number. If you drink alcohol, drink as much water as alcohol to offset the dehydrating effects of the alcohol.

“The best way to prevent dehydration is to drink enough fluids. Taste can be a big part of that,” explains Clayton Christopher, Founder and CEO of Sweet Leaf Tea in Austin, TX. “Drinking quality iced tea beverages not only provides water, it delivers the health-enhancing benefits of antioxidants.”

Healthy Hydration Choices

With a bevy of beverages filling the shelves, you may think it is easy to avoid dehydration. But drinking just any fluid is not the best way to stay hydrated. Coffee, for example, is dehydrating because of the high caffeine content. Sodas and some sports drinks contain a lot of sugar, which can negatively affect health on many levels.

Your best bet is with filtered or bottled spring water. Water that provides additional electrolytes like Glaceau’s Smart Water is also a good choice, especially if you perspire a lot. Electrolytes are important minerals such as calcium, potassium, and magnesium that can become depleted when you are dehydrated.

Some high-quality water companies are also finding ways to add refreshing flavors to their water. MetroMint water, for example, has a refreshing hint of peppermint.

You can also go beyond basic hydration by choosing a high-quality tea beverage. For example, Sweet Leaf mint and honey green tea contains 90 mg of the powerful antioxidant EGCG. The best health-promoting bottled teas begin with high quality filtered water and do not contain artificial flavorings, colorings, or other chemicals.

It’s important to make hydration a health priority. Choose your fluid sources carefully. Adding high quality, natural iced tea or flavored water adds variety and may encourage you to drink more. Making healthy hydration choices is a refreshing way to enhance an active summer’s day.