

Are you drinking enough water?

We hear a lot about what we should eat to stay healthy, but there's one thing we need even more than food each day - and that's water. Although we all know the importance of drinking enough water during the hot summer months, many people don't realize they need to drink plenty of water all year round. Every part of your body needs water to work properly, but water is particularly important for keeping the kidneys healthy.

Other questions people ask about water are:

Won't drinking water before exercise cause cramps? No. This is an old fashioned idea. You need water both before in between and after exercise.

But I drink lots of juice why do I need water? Although it's okay to have a glass of fruit juice each day, it's better to drink more water. Besides being more expensive, too much fruit juice can contribute to weight problems and tooth decay. This is why it's good to get children into the habit of drinking water - not just juice - right from the start. If you give a child a "comfort" bottle at night, make sure it contains nothing but plain water - giving juice, milk or any drink with added sugar at night is a common cause of tooth decay.

If I drink a lot of water, won't I retain fluid? No. Many women retain fluid before a period and think that drinking less water will help. But in fact they need to drink more. One of the causes of fluid retention is having too much of a mineral called sodium in the body. But drinking water helps get rid of sodium.

Doesn't drinking water make you go to the toilet at night? This shouldn't be a problem if you have plenty of water during the day, and drink only a little fluid at night. If frequent urination is making you restrict your fluid intake, talk to your doctor- there may be a problem which needs treatment. But this can usually be helped by simple exercises to strengthen the bladder - your doctor can refer you to someone who can help. Drinking enough fluid is important for good health and it's better to find a solution for frequent urination rather than drink too little.

How can I encourage the family to drink more water? On hot days, have plenty of chilled water in the fridge - for variety, try flavoring it with lemon juice or chopped mint. On cold days, drink warm water - again with lemon juice. Ask for water in restaurants, take water on picnics and serve water at the table with meals. Try using attractive containers and glasses as well - it may encourage children to drink more.

When we exercise, we build up heat in working muscles causing our internal temperatures to rise. We cool ourselves by perspiring. It is this evaporation of sweat from our skin that helps us maintain a lower core body temperature. When there is a lot of moisture in the air, evaporation isn't an effective cooling means and we keep sweating and losing fluids in order to try and stay comfortable. As a result, we have to drink more water to replenish this lost fluid.

The first drawback to dehydration is diminished performance. The water we lose through sweating comes from blood plasma. Plasma is the vehicle for red blood cells, which contain the oxygen that muscles need in order to perform. As you become dehydrated, your total blood volume is reduced, and the oxygen-carrying capability of your blood decreases. If you continue to exercise without proper fluid intake, you may experience a drop in blood pressure; feel faint, dizzy or nauseous. These are the symptoms of heat exhaustion. If you keep going, your body's ability to dissipate heat is further impaired and you may suffer heat stroke. Dehydration is one of the reasons why people develop kidney stones.

During heat stroke, your temperature can rise above 41 degrees Celsius. At this point, you no longer sweat, and seizures, coma or even death may result. Remember, blood not only carries oxygen to your working muscles, it sends it to all of our vital organs, like the brain.

How do you get enough water? Drink a glass of water every fifteen minutes during your workout. This may sound like a lot, but it is necessary to keep you hydrated. If you can't drink that much water at once, take smaller amounts every ten minutes.

You should follow the same guidelines when exercising indoors. Even if the air conditioning is on, you still sweat a lot if you spend 45 minutes or more on a stepper, treadmill or stationary bike. Don't assume you have to be outdoors for serious dehydration to occur.

Don't wait until you're thirsty to start drinking. The sensation of thirst is triggered by the hypothalamus in the brain. It measures the concentration of salts in your blood. As blood volume decreases due to sweating, your concentration of salts goes up, and the hypothalamus sends the signal to start drinking. By the time you feel thirsty, you are already dehydrated.

How can you be sure you're drinking enough water? When your urine is clear, rather than yellow, you are sufficiently hydrated. Make sure you keep drinking water after exercise. If you can weigh yourself before and after a workout, a good rule of thumb is to drink one pint of water for every pound you've lost.

Don't forget that caffeinated beverages are diuretics. These drinks make you pee and lose fluid quickly, so you'll need an additional glass of water for each cup of coffee or fizzy drink you have. Alcohol also dehydrates you, so for every beer or vodka you enjoy, match it with a glass of water. The following are some of the health conditions that can result from not drinking adequate water.

Decreased athletic performance

Decreased blood flow to the skin

Decreased blood volume
Decrease cardiac output
Decreased performance
Decreased sweat production therefore making it harder to cool down
Increased body temperature
Increased use of muscle glycogen
Reduction in bodies ability to burn fat
Retention of salt in the body
Strain on kidneys
Water retention (when you drink enough water your body only keeps what it needs)

In short: DRINK YOUR WATER!