

Importance of Hydration

Regular physical activity and healthy diets are important for healthy aging. However, the body's basic need for water is often overlooked, resulting in dehydration.

Hydration is the replacement of body fluids lost through sweating, exhaling, and eliminating waste. On average, the body loses and needs to replace about 2-3 quarts of water daily.

Luckily, many foods we eat are composed mostly of water. Foods with high water content include greens and most fruits and vegetables. Caffeinated beverages (soft drinks, tea and coffee) count, in part, toward our daily fluid intake. Though they do not dehydrate you, they can promote increased urination and should not be the primary nonfood source of liquids during your day.

The best sources of hydration are water and drinks that are primarily water (sport replacement drinks, herbal teas, lemon water and vegetable broth).

The role of water in the human body

We can last up to six weeks without food, but only one week without water. Here are some other ways water impacts our health:

- Carries nutrients and oxygen to all cells in the body.
- Helps convert food into energy
- Lubricates joints.
- Regulates body temperature.
- Protects and cushions vital organs.
- Moistens oxygen for breathing.
- Is essential for our senses to work properly.
- Is the main property of blood, which carries nutrients to cells and carries waste out of the body.
- Is one of the six nutrients essential for life (water, fat, carbohydrates, protein, vitamins and minerals).

Potential dangers of not drinking enough water or becoming dehydrated

- **Optimal function.** Your body needs to be hydrated to function at its best. If there isn't enough liquid in your body, essential functions like circulation don't perform as smoothly and your organs won't get necessary nutrients, resulting in less efficient performance.
- **Mood.** Dehydration can affect your mood. If you haven't been drinking enough water, you can feel tired, cranky or irritable. You might even imagine that you're hungry, when what your body is really craving is water.
- **Productivity.** Hydration is also important for thinking clearly. If you're dehydrated, your productivity may suffer. It's important to remember that your body loses water all day and you should replace water continually throughout the day.

Ten tips for increasing fluid intake

1. Drink a glass of water or juice first thing in the morning.
2. To meet your body's needs, and prevent frequent urination problems, drink regularly throughout the day, rather than several big gulps at once.
3. Constipation problems may be due to not drinking enough water – our bodies need water to balance fiber intake.
4. Fluids are more easily absorbed when they are cooler, about 40-60 degrees. Keep a 1-2-quart bottle of water in your refrigerator and make sure you drink and refill it daily.
5. When you pass a drinking fountain, stop for a refreshing drink.
6. Use the color of your urine as a guide for how well you are hydrated. If you urinate regularly and your urine is light yellow, you are drinking enough. If it is dark yellow, increase your fluid intake.
7. Carry a water bottle with you and drink regularly between meals.
8. Allergy sufferers and people taking medications should try to meet the fluid goals outlined above. Our kidneys and liver need extra water to process medicines.
9. Drink 1-2 cups of fluid 30 minutes before exercising and ½ cup-1 cup fluid every 25 minutes while you exercise. Within two hours after exercising, drink enough water to replace fluid lost during workout (for example, 2 cups for each pound lost).
10. Drink before you get thirsty. Thirst is a sign that your body is already dehydrated. Keep drinking regularly throughout the day even after your thirst is quenched.

Sources: Hall Health Center-UW Medicine, Fine Living Essentials, McKinley Health Center.

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