

The Importance of Hydration



As people are becoming more aware of their health, exercise routines and proper diets are more important than ever. However, the human body's basic need for water is often overlooked.

What exactly are the potential dangers of not drinking enough water or dehydration, and why is it so important to drink plenty of water during the day?

Optimal function. Your body needs to be hydrated in order to function at its optimal level. If there isn't enough liquid in your body, essential functions like circulation don't go as smoothly as they should. Your organs won't get the nutrients they need, and your body will perform its job less efficiently.

Mood. Dehydration can also 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 actually craving is water.

Productivity. Hydration is 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 continuously throughout the day.

The Role of Water in the Human Body

Water is life, and our bodies need water more than they need food, sleep, or exercise. An important component of every bodily function, water is the major portion of our digestion and elimination systems. It also cushions and lubricates brain and joint tissue. Water also transports nutrients and carries waste away from the cells. And it helps regulate body temperature by distributing heat and cooling the body through perspiration.

Our bodies are composed of water. The entire human body is about 66 percent water. Our bones are composed of 22 percent water, muscles are 76 percent and blood is 83 percent. Lungs are 90 percent, and our brains are actually 95 percent water. It is easy to see why water and hydration play such a critical role in a healthful lifestyle.

Hydration is the replacement of body fluids lost through sweating, exhaling, and elimination. It's just as important at the office or on the couch as it is in the gym. And proper hydration does more than just keep you from getting thirsty. It actually does the following for your health:

- Water carries nutrients and oxygen to all cells in the body.
- Water is the main property of blood, which carries nutrients to cells and carries wastes out of the body.
- Water helps convert food into energy.
- Water protects and cushions vital organs.
- Water lubricates joints.
- Water regulates body temperature.
- Water moistens oxygen for breathing.
- Water is essential for our senses to work properly. Hearing waves are transmitted through fluids in the ear, light is reflected through fluids in the eye, and food and odors must be dissolved in water for taste and smell.
- Water is one of the six nutrients essential for life (water, fat, carbohydrates, protein, vitamins, and minerals).
- The body can last up to six weeks without food, but only one week without water.



The Importance of Staying Hydrated

Under average circumstances, the body loses and needs to replace approximately 2 to 3 quarts of water daily. All bodily functions, including breathing, cause water loss, which means that water needs to be replaced on a daily basis. When you are asleep, you lose as much or more water as when you are awake, and you need as much water in cold weather as in warm weather.

Luckily, many of the foods we eat are composed primarily of water. Foods with particularly high water

content include greens and most fruits and vegetables. Caffeinated beverages such as soft drinks, tea, and coffee also count, in part, toward our daily fluid intake. Though they do not 'dehydrate' you, they can promote increased urination, so they should not be the primary nonfood source of liquids during your day.

The best source of hydration is probably water, or drinks that are primarily water, such as sport replacement drinks, herbal teas, lemon water, and vegetable broth.

Ten Tips for Increasing Your Fluid Intake

1. Have a glass of water or juice on arising in the morning.
2. Drink constantly throughout the day, rather than several 'big gulps' at once—this meets your body's needs and may prevent the problem of frequent urination.
3. If you have problems with constipation, it may be due to not drinking enough water—our bodies need water to balance the fiber intake that comes from fruits, vegetables, and grains.
4. Fluids are more easily absorbed from the body when they are somewhat cooler, about 40-60 degrees. Keep a one- or two-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 persons taking any medication should try to attain the fluid goals outlined above. Our kidneys and liver need extra water to process medicines.
9. When exercising, drink one to two cups of fluid 30 minutes before and half to one-cup fluid every 15 minutes of exercise.
10. Drink before you get thirsty. Thirst is actually a sign that your body is already dehydrated. Keep drinking regularly throughout the day even after your thirst is quenched.

Make water part of your daily routine for good health!

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

Visit www.texercise.com!