

Hydration

Why Do We Need to Drink Water?

Water makes up more than two-thirds of the weight of the human body. Without water, humans would die in a few days. All the cells and organs need water to function. In addition, water makes up saliva and the fluids surrounding the joints, regulates body temperature through sweating, helps prevent constipation by moving food through the intestines, and flushes toxins out of vital organs.

Recommendations

Every day people lose water through breathing, perspiration, urination, and bowel movements. For a body to function properly, this water supply must be replenished by consuming beverages and foods that contain water. Experts usually recommend drinking six to eight 8-ounce glasses of water daily. Fluid intake may need to be modified depending on level of activity, weather, and health.

- **Level of activity and exercise.**
 - Extra water must be consumed to replace fluid lost by exercise or any activity that causes sweating. An extra 1.5-2.5 cups of water will help replace fluid loss by short periods of exercise. Longer exercise may require drinking a sports drink that contains sodium, as this will help replace sodium lost in sweat. It is important to continue drinking fluids after the exercise is completed.
- **Environment.**
 - Hot or humid weather can cause sweating and require additional intake of fluid. Heated indoor air also can cause skin to lose moisture during wintertime.
- **Illnesses or health conditions.**
 - Fever, vomiting, and diarrhea cause the body to lose additional fluids. In these situations, more water should be consumed. In some cases, a doctor may recommend oral rehydration solutions such as a sports drink. Additionally, increased fluid intake may be necessary with certain conditions, including bladder infections or urinary tract stones.

- Some conditions such as heart failure and some types of kidney, liver and adrenal diseases may impair the body's ability to get rid of extra fluid. If any health problems exist, a doctor should be asked before increasing the amount of water taken in.
- **Pregnancy or breast-feeding.**
 - Women who are expecting or breast-feeding need additional fluids to stay hydrated. Large amounts of fluid are used especially when nursing. It is recommended that pregnant women drink about 10 cups of fluids daily and women who breast-feed consume about 13 cups of fluids a day.

How to Know if Someone is Hydrated?

The easiest way to know if enough fluid is being consumed is to look at the color of the urine. If enough water is taken in, urine will be clear or pale yellow. A darker yellow means not enough water is being consumed. People who drink enough water also usually have soft bowel movements. Hard bowel movements or constipation can be signs that someone is not getting enough water.

Easy Tips to Improve Hydration

It is important to take into account fluid restrictions due to medical conditions before implementing any changes in diet.

- Drink a glass of water or other calorie-free or low-calorie beverage with each meal and between each meal.
- Drink water before, during, and after exercise.
- Drink a glass of water upon waking in the morning, before coffee or tea.
- Keep a cup or water bottle at work. Take several sips of water each hour. Or carry a container of water with you and take sips throughout the day.
- Take a sip whenever passing a drinking fountain.
- If drinking plain water becomes tiring, add a packet of sugarless flavoring or a slice of lemon or lime in plain or sparkling water.

Food Sources

Some fruits and vegetables contain a lot of water such as watermelon and lettuce. Liquid foods and beverages like soup, milk, and juices are also high in water. Alcoholic beverages and beverages containing caffeine (such as coffee, tea, and colas) are not the best choices because they have a diuretic effect – they cause the body to release water. Drinking water is the main, and best, source of water.

Additional Concerns

Although uncommon, it is possible to drink too much water. Too much water is dangerous because it will dilute the amount of salt in the body. This imbalance could cause serious problems such as confusion, seizures, and coma. Experts advise athletes who do intense activity to drink a sports drink that contains sodium, other electrolytes, and some sugar.