

Healthy Hydration

Water is the body's primary chemical component. Water makes up nearly 75% of our body weight. Every organ in the body depends on water to function. Water flushes out toxins, carries nutrients to cells, keeps tissues moistened, and is necessary to keep the body's organs functioning well so that we may maintain health and avoid sickness.

Every day water is lost through breathing, perspiring, metabolizing and processing urine and bowel movements. As a result, you must replenish the body's water supply by consuming beverages and foods that contain water. While the exact amount that each person needs each day depends on many variables, The Institute of Medicine advises that men consume roughly 3.7 liters and women consume roughly 2.7 liters of total beverages each day.

A lack of adequate water intake can lead to dehydration. Dehydration occurs when the body doesn't have enough water to carry out normal bodily functions. Some signs of dehydration include dry mouth, dry skin and eyes, fatigue, light headedness, dizziness, muscle cramping and weakness, decreased or darkened urine, nausea, and heart palpitations.

Daily Water Intake

8 X 8 Rule. Is a general guideline that we may use to approximate adequate daily water intake. Most adults need to drink at least **eight 8 oz glasses** of water each day to stay adequately hydrated. Other factors may cause you to need to drink additional amounts of water.

Things that affect water needs

Climate. Hot or humid weather cause us to sweat more making it necessary to replace the extra fluid lost. Dry climates, like in Colorado, or heated indoor air during wintertime can cause skin to lose moisture, making it necessary to drink additional water to stay adequately hydrated.

Exercise. If you exercise or do activities that make you sweat, extra water (and electrolytes) are needed to replenish the fluid lost.

Illness. Infections that cause fever, vomiting, or diarrhea can cause the body to lose additional fluids and be in need of water and electrolyte replacement. On the other hand, conditions such as heart failure and some types of kidney and liver diseases can impair excretion of water requiring limitations on fluid intake.

Medications. Many prescribed medications, especially psychiatric medications, have drying effects which result in the need for more daily fluid intake.

Pregnancy or breast-feeding. Women who are expecting or breast-feeding need additional fluids to stay well hydrated.

Other sources of water

Although it is advantageous to get most of our water needs from drinking water, we do get some water indirectly from other things we take in. Fruits and vegetables have high water content, some including watermelon and tomatoes are over 90% water by weight. Beverages such as milk and juice also have large water components. Although beer, wine and caffeinated beverages like coffee, tea and soda have water content, they have diuretic properties and can add to dehydration when used regularly.

Staying well-hydrated

It's important to drink water throughout the day to PREVENT dehydration and the problems that can result. Keep in mind, by the time you've become thirsty, it's likely you're already experiencing dehydration. Furthermore, as we get older, our body is less able to sense dehydration early and the brain signals for thirst can be delayed. If you're taking in enough fluid each day, you will rarely feel thirsty and you'll produce colorless or slightly yellow urine (approximately 1.5 liters per day).

Healthy hydration habits

- drink a glass of water with each meal and between each meal
- hydrate before, during and after exercise
- limit alcoholic and caffeinated drinks
- notice signs of thirst or signs of dehydration early and drink to replenish fluid level as needed

*Talk to your doctor if you are concerned about your fluid intake and seek medical evaluation promptly if you experience severe or prolonged symptoms of dehydration. Although it is rare in adults who consume an average American diet, drinking overly excessive amounts of water can cause medical problems.

[Sources: MayoClinic.com 4/08; Institute of Medicine Concensus Report 2/04]