

The Importance of Staying Hydrated

Are You Feeling Tired, Dizzy, Thirsty or Confused? You May Be Dehydrated.

By: Karen Rehm, Wellness Services Manager

Sweating due to hot, humid conditions or extreme physical activity can lead to dehydration. Our body is made up of 60% water which needs to be replenished throughout the day. Drinking enough water is important for many reasons. Water helps regulate body temperature, keeps joints lubricated, prevents infections, delivers nutrients to cells, and keeps organs functioning properly. Being well-hydrated also improves sleep quality, cognition, and mood.

Most of our hydration comes from drinking water but we can also get water from juicy foods like lettuce, watermelon, and cucumber. Other liquids like coffee, tea, and milk can help with hydration but only in small amounts. Drinking water is the best way to stay hydrated. But it's best to stay away from sugar-sweetened beverages when trying to stay hydrated, says Walter Willett, professor of epidemiology and nutrition at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. Even energy drinks and vitamin waters, can be loaded with sugar and not worth the effort."

The easiest way to tell if we are hydrated is to check our urine color whenever we go to the bathroom. If our urine is a dark color like apple juice, we need to drink more. If our urine is pale yellow or close to clear then we are drinking just the right amount.

Lack of water can lead to dehydration — a condition that occurs when you don't have enough water in your body to carry out normal functions. Even mild dehydration can drain your energy and make you tired.

Signs of dehydration differ by age group. Infants and young children may not be able to recognize their need for fluids, so it's critical to provide frequent fluid intake and keep an eye out for symptoms of dehydration: irritability or lethargy, no tears when crying, no wet diapers for as little as three hours, a dry mouth and tongue, sunken eyes and cheeks, and a shrinking of the soft spot on top of the head.

Adults show much different signs of dehydration, including fatigue, dizziness, confusion, less-frequent urination and extreme thirst, but the latter has one exception: the elderly. Older adults may not feel thirsty but can still be dehydrated.

How Much Water is Enough?

We've all heard that we should consume at least 8-8 oz glasses of water a day. But does this recommendation still hold true? The National Academies of Medicine recommends approximately 11 cups (2.7 liters) of fluids a day for the average woman and almost 16 cups (3.7 liters) for men. Though that may sound difficult to achieve, the fluids can come from many sources besides water, including food.

Another way to look at it, which may be easier to remember, is to drink half your body weight in ounces of water (i.e., 200 lb. man, would consume 100 ounces of water/fluids each day).

If you struggle with drinking water, try some of these tips:

- Drink at least one 8 oz glass of water when you wake up
- Drink sparkling water if you want some fizz
- Set reminders throughout the day that signals you to take a drink
- Drink water whenever you eat meals or snacks
- Drink water before, during, and after exercise
- Keep it fun by adding flavors like True Lemon, Crystal Lite, fresh fruit, or flavor drops
- Try to drink more water in extreme heat or cold

Additional Heat Safety Tips: Avoid eating large meals (large meals high in protein raises body heat), limit caffeine and alcohol intake (speeds up dehydration), take several breaks if working outside in extreme temperatures and never leave children or pets in a vehicle in extreme temperatures.

To schedule a Rethink Your Drink presentation and/or wellness consultation, please contact the Nebraska Safety Council at 402-483-2511 ext. 102 or send an email to Karen at krehm@nesafetycouncil.org.

Sources: Harvard Medical School, Mayo Clinic and CDC.