

Water is important! Make sure you drink enough.

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Would you buy a new car - only have one quart of water in the engine and drive it from Texas to California in the middle of the summer - Everyone says no - Of course not!!!! But when I ask them why they are doing the same amount of stress to their body by not drinking enough water they do not have an answer.

NEW RESEARCH concludes:

- 75% of Americans are chronically dehydrated. Inconsistent percentage (75% vs. 1/3, later)
- In 37% of Americans, the thirst mechanism is so weak that it is often mistaken for hunger. Even MILD dehydration will slow down one's metabolism as much as 3%.
- One glass of water shuts down midnight hunger pangs for almost 100% of the dieters studied in a U-Washington study.
- Lack of water is the #1 trigger of daytime fatigue. 8-10 glasses of water a day could significantly ease back and joint pain for up to 80% of sufferers.
- A mere 2% drop in body water can trigger fuzzy short-term memory, trouble with basic math, and difficulty focusing on the computer screen or on a printed page.
- Drinking 5 glasses of water daily decreases the risk of colon cancer by 45%, plus it can slash the risk of breast cancer by 79%, and one is 50% less likely to develop bladder cancer.

If you care about healthful eating, chances are you're getting enough protein, fiber, vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. But you may be forgetting one of the most important items of all -- water.

Water accounts for 60% of body weight and is vital for all body functions. It's used to generate energy...propel nerve impulses... drive muscle contractions. You cannot function at peak capacity without enough water. Yet one-third of all Americans suffer from chronic dehydration.

Over time, even mild dehydration poses numerous health risks. These include...

- **Cancer.** Low fluid consumption is associated with increased risk for colon, breast and urinary tract cancers. In a recent study, risk for colon cancer was substantially lower in women who drank more than five glasses of water daily than in those who drank two or fewer glasses.
- **Kidney stones.** About 15% of people develop kidney stones at least once in their lives. Dehydration promotes the process, concentrating in kidneys the calcium salts and other compounds that constitute stones. One recent study showed that individuals with a history of kidney stones could reduce the risk for recurrence by 15% just by drinking at least four more cups of water daily.
- **Diminished coordination and thinking.** Without enough water, hand -- eye coordination falters and reaction time slows. The mind is less nimble, and short-term memory flags. Many older people who consult a doctor fearing dementia may actually be suffering from dehydration.
- **Medication problems.** Dehydration concentrates drugs in the body, effectively raising the doses. This increases the risk for side effects and toxicity.
- **Constipation.** Dehydration hardens stools and makes them difficult to pass.

HOW MUCH WATER IS NEEDED?

You don't have to run marathons to risk dehydration. You lose water continuously simply through

respiration, perspiration and excretion. Thirst is a poor indicator of hydration, particularly in children and people over age 60. By the time thirst sets in, you have already lost 2% of your body's weight in water. Signs of dehydration that you may notice are a slight headache... dry eyes... a burning sensation in the stomach... and fatigue.

Check your urine. Unless you've just taken vitamins, it should be odorless and nearly colorless -- no darker than straw. Some water is replenished through the food you eat, especially if your diet is rich in fruits and vegetables. But that's not nearly enough to replace all the water you lose daily. For that, you need to drink at least 64 ounces of water -- eight cups -- a day.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DRINK?

Milk and fruit juice supply water. But they can also pack a lot of extra calories. If you favor these drinks, choose low-fat milk and no-sugar-added juices. But make sure at least five of your daily servings are pure water.

Caffeinated and alcoholic beverages -- if more than two servings -- do not count toward your daily water intake. They flush out some of the fluid they supply. Offset each caffeinated or alcoholic beverage with one cup of water.

Increase your daily water consumption by at least an extra two cups if you...

- ... consume a high-fiber diet.
- ... take diuretics.
- ... live at a high altitude or in a very dry or hot climate.
- ... are pregnant or nursing.
- ... are dieting to lose weight.
- ... are traveling.

If you exercise vigorously for 15 minutes or more, your need for extra water is even greater. The American College of Sports Medicine recommends that you drink 16 ounces of liquid two hours before exercise... four to eight ounces every 15 minutes while you are exercising... and at least 16 ounces after you exercise.

Caution: Endurance athletes who exercise for more than one hour may need replacement drinks such as Gatorade or All Sport. These supply minerals and carbohydrates along with water.

HOW TO DRINK

Get in the habit of drinking throughout the day. Ideal schedule: Two glasses of water after waking, to replace what was lost during sleep. Divvy up the rest of your quota throughout the day... in midmorning... at lunch... in place of a late-afternoon coffee break...and at dinner. Make it easy to maintain your intake. Keep a pitcher of water at work. Carry a water bottle. Place a carafe on your bedside table.

Water overdose is a potential problem only for those with an illness causing fluid retention, such as kidney or liver disease or congestive heart failure. Consult your doctor in that case. In general, the only side effect of drinking more water is an extra trip or two per day to the bathroom. That's a sign you're doing it right.