

Benefits of Drinking Water and Health

Information On The Importance Drinking Water

by Marianne Woods Cirone, M.S., R.Y.T., Certified Yoga Teacher

How many times a day do we feel our energy falling and reach for food when we are actually in need of water? How often do we spend time and money on medical treatment for conditions that could have been prevented or alleviated through proper hydration? For many of us, too many times. Staying properly hydrated is one of the easiest and least expensive ways to stay in good health. Unfortunately our sense of thirst, especially as we age, can be a poor indicator of our needs for fluids. Experts say that we are often dehydrated before we feel thirsty. However, we can start to develop good hydration habits so that we are functioning at our best.

Benefits of Drinking Water

The body is 60-70% water and adequate water intake helps to provide the following benefits:

- Flushes out wastes, transports nutrients, regulates body temperature, maintains acid-alkaline balance and support chemical processes.
- Keeps skin moist, energy levels up and alleviates some headaches.
- Keeping well hydrated often helps to regulate appetite.
People often mistake thirst and hunger, and eat when their bodies are actually craving fluid.

While becoming severely and acutely dehydrated can have dire consequences, studies have shown that a low level of chronic dehydration can also have negative effects. Having an adequate fluid intake can help avoid the potential effects of chronic low level dehydration listed below:

- Increased risk of developing urinary tract infections, kidney stones and constipation (and its potential effects, including hemorrhoids and diverticulosis).
- Increased risk of bladder, breast and colon cancer.
- Mitral Valve Prolapse, with the symptoms of MVP actually being a sign of low blood volume.
- An increase in fluid retention, as the body tries to hold on to water for survival purposes as hydration levels decrease.
- An array of maladies can be caused or exacerbated by chronic dehydration including heartburn and ulcers, fatigue, diabetes, depression, allergies, asthma, rheumatoid pain, back pain, heart pain, headaches, high blood pressure, high cholesterol levels and leg pain according to the physician F. Batmanghlij who authored [Your Body's Many Cries for Water](#).
- Other symptoms of dehydration include weakness, loss of energy, muscle cramps and dizziness.
- Women going into premature labor are often given IV fluids, and find the labor stopping as they hydrate. Some sources cite dehydration as a contributor to morning sickness also.

How much water do you need?

Various sources including the Mayo Clinic Women's Health Source, say that you should aim for ½ oz. of water per pound of body weight. So for example, if you weigh 120 lbs., you would be drinking 60 oz. of water, or 7.5 cups of water per day. A 200 lb. person would require 12.5 cups daily. Andrew Weil, M.D., suggests less may be sufficient if the urine is light in color. Note that mouth breathers tend to tend more fluids as they tend to become dehydrated more easily.

Recent headlines stated that since food contains water, there is no need to drink an additional eight glasses per day. However, the amount of water in your food depends on what you are eating. If you are eating a lot of fruits, vegetables or soups, your fluid intake may be adequate. Consider though, that, a slice of bread has less than two teaspoons of water in it. Additionally, the amount which is required to sustain life vs. that is required for optimal health and vitality may differ substantially. Objective tests for hydration include the color of your urine (it should be light colored) as well as a blood test.

It is preferable to sip water throughout the day rather than to chug it because it will give your body more time to absorb it, according to [The Detox Solution](#) by Patricia Fitzgerald.

What counts as a glass of water?

Eight ounces of pure water, diluted fruit juice, herb tea, or decaffeinated coffee or tea are counted fully toward the total, although there may be drawbacks to the fruit juice (sugar) and the coffee (chemicals used in the decaffeination process). Some sources suggest that because of the potentially dehydrating effects, black or green tea, caffeinated sodas, and coffee count as 50% water. Any type of alcoholic beverage counts as 0% water, and is considered dehydrating. A study showed that adults who drank six cups of coffee daily experienced chronic mild dehydration, since they lost an average of 2.7 of total body water. (Alcohol inhibits the productions of ADH, the anti-diuretic hormone so your body loses more fluids.)

Drinks containing caffeine and other chemicals can be taxing to the digestive system. The phosphorus content in cola drinks is so high it can lead to a calcium/phosphorus imbalance and contribute to diseases like osteoporosis. The high sugar content of some beverages including fruit juices can lead to insulin resistance, weight gain, and kidney problems. According to Dr. Andrew Weil, Integrative Medicine expert, the high fructose corn syrup found in many juices can negatively affect brain functioning.

How to increase your water consumption

An easy way to boost your fluid intake is to start the day with a fresh cup or two of water or a cup or two of herbal tea. These first glasses of water are so critical because you are reversing any mild dehydration that may have occurred overnight, especially if you cut off your water consumption a couple of hours before bedtime in order to reduce nighttime trips to the bathroom. If you are in the habit of showering and dressing before you go to the kitchen in the morning, you could leave a cup or bottle of water handy for you to drink during your dressing routine. I always bring a huge cup of water with me when I take a bath, and the combination of the heat and the drinking of the water feels so detoxifying and refreshing. Some say beginning the day with a cup of hot water with 1 tsp. of lemon juice and perhaps a bit of honey helps to detoxify the body and improve digestion by releasing bile from the liver and improving elimination. In the mornings I like an herbal tea called by Celestial Seasonings called A.M. Detox, which is said to stimulate the liver function.

It is best to drink water on an empty stomach in order to avoid unnecessary dilution of digestive juices, so about a half hour before meals drink a glass of water. Try to get into the habit of bringing a water bottle with you when you go out, whether to shop, walk or to an activity. There is nothing worse than getting to an event an finding that your only option for water is a yucky-looking water fountain. An easy way to keep bottles handy is to freeze an half a bottle of water and then fill it up the rest of the way before you go out. Just remember not to re-use plastic bottles from bottled water more than once or twice because they can leech harmful chemicals as the plastics begin to break down.

If you get bored with drinking plain water, try lemon, lime or even cucumber slices in your water (a hot trend). Low-sodium club soda is an option with 0 calories. The herbal sweetener Stevia helps to make a nice, sweet drink like lemonade or iced tea without sugar or potentially harmful chemicals. There are dozens of types of herbal teas that are excellent hot or iced. You can also mix different types of teas for a new blend of iced teas, the bags steep if you leave in a pitcher of water in the refrigerator for several hours or overnight

Smoothies made with fruit (frozen organic is great), yogurt (plain, low fat), soy protein powder, ground flax seed and water or skim or soy milk are tasty and healthy. Remember that the most of the healthiest foods are also loaded with water. Some foods that are packed with water are of course soups, plus all fruits and vegetables, but especially watermelon, oranges, apples, cucumbers, iceberg lettuce and tomatoes. The new immersion blenders are great for making soups by simply sautéing a few roughly chopped vegetables (choose from some such as carrots, onions, mushrooms, spinach, cauliflower and then add a peeled potato or two to thicken), adding water and seasonings, and then simmering and blending for a delicious way to get fiber, vitamins and fluids.

Cautions to consider

People with kidney problems or other conditions where fluid intake needs to be limited should be following their doctor's recommendations, and the appropriate sodium intake is essential. One potential but rare side effect of fluid intake can be hyponatremia in which electrolytes become imbalanced. Note also that you may need to increase your salt intake as your fluid intake increases, and possibly some orange juice or other item for its potassium content, so discuss this with your health care provider.