

# Got water?

## The connection between hydration and health

By **Chrystle Fiedler**

DRINKING ENOUGH WATER is essential for good health. We need water to help transport nutrients from protein, carbohydrates and fats to bodily tissues via the bloodstream, and to help get rid of waste, regulate temperature and prevent disease.

"Water is necessary for many of the body's biochemical reactions," says Bryan Stuchell, a physician and chief medical officer for MedExpress Urgent Care Centers in West Virginia. "Without the proper amount of water in the body, these functions are not as efficient as they should be."

Mild dehydration can lead to irritability, lack of focus and fatigue. More severe dehydration can result in headaches, muscle cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke during exercise in warm weather. Chronic dehydration can lead to constipation and kidney stones.

### Checking levels

You can tell if you are drinking enough water by checking the color of your urine. "If your mouth feels dry, or your urine is strong and bright yellow, you may be dehydrated," says Suzy Cohen, a registered pharmacist in Florida. "It should be clear to light yellow." Bear in mind that bright yellow urine could also occur if you are taking vitamins that contain riboflavin.

### How much to hydrate?

Most healthy adults need between six and eight medium glasses of fluid a day. "But," says physician and Hawaii Costco member Jacob Teitelbaum, "instead of counting glasses of water, just keep a [supply of] good-quality water around all day long. Periodically, check in with your mouth. If it's dry or you feel thirsty, drink."

### The Costco Connection

Costco carries bottled spring and mineral water, as well as tap-water purifiers.

Drinking water is also a natural energy booster. "The next time you're tired, drink a cool 8-ounce glass of water," says Dr. Teitelbaum. "You'll find that you have more energy and that your mind is clearer."

### Eating water

You can increase your water intake by eating certain foods. "Water is most abundant in fruits and vegetables," says Costco member Marnie Snyder Dominy, an expert in exercise physiology, and a professor of health science and personal wellness at Olympic College in Bremerton, Washington. "An apple contains 84 percent water, an orange 87 percent and an avocado 81 percent. A tomato contains about 97 percent water, broccoli 91 percent, cabbage 93 percent and lettuce 96 percent."

### Choosing the right water for you

TAP, SPRING AND MINERAL water are all good ways to hydrate. But there are differences. "Water is a matter of taste just like food," says Jacob Teitelbaum, a physician. "Find a water that tastes best to you." You may like spring water, which is collected directly from the spring where it rises from the ground, and bottled at the source. It's the closest taste to tap water, which is typically treated with chlorine to reduce bacteria. Mineral water emerges from under the ground, then flows over rocks before it's collected, resulting in a higher content of various minerals and possibly affecting the taste. Try a few brands to see which you like most and then drink it regularly.—CF

### Drying-out drinks

Caffeinated beverages (soda, tea, coffee) and alcoholic beverages, on the other hand, can cause dehydration. "Even though they're liquids, they contain compounds that cause a diuretic effect," says Dr. Stuchell. "This tricks the kidneys into releasing more than an appropriate amount of water, which can lead to dehydration." Foods high in protein can cause dehydration too, especially if they are consumed in large amounts.

Sugar can also make you more dehydrated, says Dr. Teitelbaum. "If you drink beverages that are loaded with sugar and caffeine, it wreaks havoc on your metabolism and makes you more dehydrated."

### Potential problems

If you feel like your thirst is unquenchable, though, this could be a sign of diabetes, says Cohen. "Many people do not realize that insatiable thirst is part of the diabetes profile, and while their fasting sugars may be within normal range when it is measured, the thirst could be a clue that further testing is needed."

There are dangers from drinking too much water. According to the July 2008 issue of *Harvard Men's Health Watch*, drinking 3 or 4 quarts of water in a few hours can lead to water intoxication and hyponatremia (low blood sodium levels), brain swelling and even death. This happens because too much water dilutes the sodium and other electrolytes found in the body to a point where normal body functions (particularly brain functions) are adversely affected. But this, says Dr. Stuchell, is unusual. "It requires such a large amount of water to be ingested that it is rarely seen except when someone engages in long bouts of intensive exercise, like running, and drinks a lot of water, but does not replace the salts lost with sweating."

### Make it a habit

To increase your water consumption to healthy levels, you can start by replacing other beverages with water or drink a glass of water with every meal. But don't stop there. "Make a conscious effort to have water with you at all times, in the car, at your desk, in your briefcase or purse," says Dominy. "Just keep working on it and it will become habitual." ☑

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