

Hydration 101: The Case for Drinking Enough Water

By Barbara Levine, R.D., Ph.D.

Next to oxygen, water is the human body's most important nutrient. Yet 75 percent of Americans are chronically dehydrated and fail to drink the eight, 8-ounce servings of water per day recommended by health and nutrition experts.

Here are the facts on why it's important to ensure you're properly hydrated.

- Water plays a vital role in regulating body temperature, transporting nutrients and oxygen to cells, removing waste, cushioning joints and protecting organs and tissues.
- Water's ability to dissolve a multitude of substances allows our cells to utilize valuable nutrients, minerals and chemicals in biological processes, and water's surface tension enables our body to mobilize these elements efficiently.
- Up to 60 percent of the human body is water, the brain is 75 percent water, blood is 82 percent water, and lungs are nearly 90 percent water.
- The body loses water via the skin by perspiration, kidneys by urine, lungs by exhaled water vapor, and intestine by feces.
- At normal activity levels, people lose two to three cups of water a day in perspiration. But during an hour of vigorous exercise, people sweat out approximately a quart of water.
- Deep yellow or amber colored urine can be a sign of dehydration.

With all that in mind, here are five tips for maintaining proper hydration:

- Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink water. By the time you feel thirsty, you probably have already lost two or more cups of your total body water.
- Don't substitute caffeinated coffees, teas, sodas or alcoholic beverages for water. Caffeine and alcohol can act as diuretics, causing you to lose water through increased urination.
- Don't underestimate the amount of fluids lost from perspiration. You need to drink two cups of water for each pound lost following a workout.
- Start and end your day with a serving of water. Your body loses water while you sleep.
- When it's warm outside, cold water is the best fluid for keeping hydrated. Cool water is absorbed much more quickly than warm fluids and may have a positive effect on cooling off your overheated body.

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