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PRESS RELEASE

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WATER: A KEY NUTRIENT

Drinking enough water is key to maintaining our health.

Water is the only fluid that can help us stay hydrated. Since more than half our body weight is made up of water, drinking enough water every day is the only way to maintain a healthy level of nutrition.

“Don’t wait until you’re thirsty to take a drink,” Beth Nacke, Assistant Extension Educator, Registered Dietitian, says. “Thirst is a sign of dehydration.”

Nacke explains that, depending on the climate, the human body cannot survive more than three or four days without water. While some foods, such as melons or juicy fruits, provide some of the moisture the body needs, there is no substitute for water when it comes to staying hydrated.

“You sometimes hear the comment that we must intake enough fluids to stay hydrated,” Nacke says. “That’s not entirely accurate. Fluids like soda or sports drinks cannot replace water. Our body uses water to flush out toxins, aid digestion and complete many other bodily functions.”

Our bodies use water in all cells, organs and tissues to help with functions such as regulating body temperature. Water helps our joints move smoothly, and our brain, eyes and spinal cord depend on water for protection.

Water moves food through the intestinal tract, washes out waste products, and prevents constipation. We lose water through body functions such as breathing, sweating and digestion. One highly accurate test of hydration levels is the color of urine output.

“When we talk to youth about staying hydrated, we tell them that if your urine is the color of lemonade, you’re probably well hydrated. If it looks like apple juice, you need to drink water,” Nacke says.

There isn’t a specific daily recommendation for water because of variability in climate, physical activity level, state of health and physical size. Typically, an adult should drink a minimum of 6 to 8 eight-ounce glasses of water per day. Persons working outside, especially in high temperatures, will benefit from drinking between 8 and 10 glasses of water.

Food sources of water include lettuce, celery and other crisp vegetables, which are at least 90% water. Milk, 100% fruit juices and clear soups are also good sources of water. Grain products such as pasta may be up to 1/3 water.

Fats, such as butter or margarine, contain the least amount of water. Alcoholic and caffeinated beverage (coffee and pop) are poor sources of water because they increase urine production.

Even though solid food is a source of water, additional water is needed.

Symptoms of dehydration include:

- Dry lips and mouth
- Small amount of saliva

- Small amount of urine
- Dark yellow urine

Outdoor activities such as gardening are less intense than many agricultural tasks and won't require rehydrating as often. For those engaged in vigorous activity in high temperatures, it's helpful to drink two or three glasses of water one to two hours before going outside. Once outdoors, it's important to take water breaks every 15 minutes to avoid dehydration. Whenever possible, scheduling strenuous activities for the cooler parts of the day will help in remaining adequately hydrated.

"To help remind ourselves to drink, we can use a water bottle, an app on the phone or even a simple egg timer that's reset to every 15 minutes," Nacke says. "A water bottle is a great visual reminder that we need to drink. We can quickly see the level of water in the bottle to help us keep track of our daily water intake."

For those who don't like to drink water, placing vegetables such as cucumbers or fruit such as lemon or berries to help flavor the water can help encourage higher water consumption without adding a lot of sugar or calories. To flavor water, a small amount of 100% fruit juice could also be added to water.

When cold water is preferred, maintaining a container of water in the refrigerator helps make sure adequate water is available throughout the day. Ice cubes and use of a straw can also help in consuming adequate amounts of water.

Loss of water could lead to heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Warning signs that require immediate medical attention include:

- Rapid strong pulse
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- High fever
- Weakness

Those who are pregnant, or breast-feeding should drink additional water if working in hot

weather or exercising. To help children and older adults stay hydrated, offer water to drink throughout the day.

Children have a lower sweating capacity and tolerate high temperatures less efficiently than adults. It's important to carefully monitor infants, young children and older adults for signs of dehydration. In older adults, their thirst mechanism may not be as efficient, and medications and disease may affect fluid intake and water balance.

"It's important to stay hydrated, but drinking adequate water each day also aids so many bodily functions, such as digestion," Nacke says. "Drinking enough water is an easy preventative measure. It may take some time to develop the habit, but it helps avoid many health issues."

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