

Water- the most overlooked nutrient.

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When we think about nutrition and health we usually think about calorie counting, eating less sugar or harmful fats, consuming more fiber, etc. but quite often we overlook the benefits of adequate water consumption. It is not uncommon for people to go the entire day without drinking water or worse they supplement with sodas instead of water which throws their metabolism completely off balance.

Our bodies are comprised of over 60% water; this essential nutrient keeps our body in a state of balance and provides us with energy and nutrients. The functions of these bodily fluids, which is primarily water, include digestion, absorption, circulation, creation of saliva, transportation of nutrients, and maintenance of body temperature.

Water is found in non alcoholic liquids, plain water and water dense foods. Drinking water is essential for optimal health. Kaiser Permanente nephrologist Steven Guest, MD, agrees: "Fluid losses occur continuously, from skin evaporation, breathing, urine, and stool and these losses must be replaced daily for good health," he says. When your water intake does not equal your output, you can become dehydrated. Fluid losses are accentuated in warmer climates, during strenuous exercise, in high altitudes, and in older adults, whose sense of thirst may not be as sharp.

A general recommendation for consuming water is aim for about half of your body weight in ounces per day. If your goal is optimal health and weight loss, plain water is the best option. You can add some fresh cut fruit in the water for flavor without adding too many calories. Lemon, lime, berries, or melons are all great in plain water. This will not drive up insulin levels like flavored coffee drinks, juice, sweet tea or soda does. Keeping insulin levels under control will allow the body to burn fat rather than store it. Artificially sweetened diet drinks have been shown to alter blood sugar levels, in addition to the increased risk of certain cancers and thyroid disruption that goes along with consuming artificial sweeteners. For optimal results, stick with plain water.

Often the early signs of hunger are actually thirst or dehydration. If thirst is ignored or overlooked it could result in excessive calories being consumed. By drinking 1-2 cups of water before meals we tend to eat a significantly less amount of calories, also resulting in weight loss if done regularly.

Water provides your muscles with energy. If muscle cells don't maintain their balance of fluids and electrolytes they shrivel, which can result in muscle fatigue and poor performance. Simply put, when muscles do not have enough water they will not be as strong and energy and performance will suffer. This is especially true for those who play sports or do work outside in hot climates.

Our kidneys do an amazing job of cleansing and ridding your body of toxins as long as your intake of water is adequate every day. Body fluids (which are mainly water) transport waste products in and out of cells. The main toxin in the body is blood urea nitrogen, a water-soluble waste that is able to pass through the kidneys to be excreted in the urine. When you're getting enough fluids, urine flows freely, is light in color and free of odor. When your body is not getting enough fluids, urine concentration, color, and odor increases because the kidneys trap extra fluid for bodily functions. Over time if you chronically drink a low amount of fluids, you may be at higher risk for kidney stones, especially during the hot months.

Some tips to increase your fluid intake and increase your overall health through the benefits of water are:

Have 1-2 cups before every snack and meal, avoid drinking a lot while eating, this could dilute digestive enzymes, resulting in an upset stomach and bloating.

If you are bored with plain water add fresh fruit to it and let it sit in a glass pitcher over night to fully absorb the flavor of the fruit; you're likely to drink more liquids if you like the way they taste.

Eat more fruits and vegetables. Their high water content will add to your hydration. About 20% of our fluid intake comes from foods.

Keep a container of water with you in your car, at your desk, or in your bag. Preferably drink out of BPA (Bisphenol A) free containers like glass bottles or stainless steel containers.

If possible drink filtered water. The preferred filtration system is reverse osmosis; this has been proven to remove the most toxins including lead, excessive sodium and parasites. These toxins could potentially disrupt your metabolism including thyroid and sex hormone balance and contaminated water could compromise the immune systems of children, elderly, and those who are going through cancer treatment or any auto-immune disorder.

References:

CDC; Lead and Drinking Water from Private Wells; May 2010.

<http://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/drinking/private/wells/disease/lead.html>

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<http://www.webmd.com/diet/features/6-reasons-to-drink-water?page=2>