

DEHYDRATION - the benefits of drinking water

Dehydration can occur in both an acute and a chronic state. The former is the type many of us have seen in 'desert movies', or on the sports field when athletes suffer cramps due to over-exercising in hot conditions.

Chronic dehydration is much less obvious and occurs over time when we drink less water than we need. If the body learns over time that water is not forthcoming, it will adjust by becoming less sensitive to thirst. However, instead we begin to get symptoms like dry lips, dry skin, muscular aches and pains, fatigue, digestive problems, constipation and eczema.

When insufficient water is taken in, the body will do its best to hold on to the water it does have. Water is particularly needed inside cells to carry out most of its functions, and in order to prevent a cell losing its precious liquid, it will build around itself a layer comprising fats, proteins and cholesterol. Whilst this layer does indeed prevent excess water loss from the cells, it also, unfortunately, makes it more difficult for new water to enter. The existing water becomes gradually less energetic, like a stagnant pond, and new water can't easily enter the cells and sits outside, making the tissues waterlogged and the bloodstream mildly diluted, telling the brain that we do not need water and thereby reducing our thirst and perpetuating the dehydration cycle.

Meanwhile our liver is busy working overtime, supplying the extra fats, proteins and cholesterol used to build the 'protective' layer around cells. This all takes a lot of energy which is no longer available for other organs and functions in the body, and fatigue and lethargy are very common initial symptoms. When the liver is overloaded, it doesn't function at its best in breaking down toxins, or building other compounds we need. The kidneys and general body tissues become overloaded, and in many people these toxins enter the fat cells where they are safer to the body than floating around in the blood. More water is drawn into the fat cells to dilute the toxins, and an extra layer of fat goes around them. Water retention increases. Insufficient water is available in the bowels and constipation results.

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This state of dehydration causes excessive acidity in the tissues and blood, helping to cause a variety of conditions such as joint and muscle pains, eczema, psoriasis and gallstones (due to overconcentration of bile due to lack of water).

To get an idea of how much water we need to consume on a daily basis, consider the amount we lose every day: approximately two pints each day in urine, approximately the same through sweat, and about a pint via stool and nasal mucus.

REHYDRATION

*We all have different needs. If you are thirsty, quench it with water. Your body is asking for it.

*Water means water. Fruit juice, tea, coffee, cola, herb tea, etc. are all fluids, but DO NOT COUNT AS WATER.

*Tea, coffee, alcohol, cola, fruit juices and soft drinks are all potentially dehydrating. Each time you have a drink like this, follow it with a glass of water within 15 minutes.

*Drink all water at room temperature or warmer. Iced drinks are not good for the body, and shut down digestion.

*If you are not thirsty, drink water anyway.

*Approximately 1 ½ - 2 litres for an adult - proportionately less for children.

*Vary mineral water, to obtain a balance of minerals.

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