

Why is water so important for my body? How do I know when I'm dehydrated?



Why is water so important?

The human body is about 60-70% water! We need water to:

- cool our bodies (when we sweat)
- digest food
- carry nutrients and remove waste
- cushion organs and joints
- maintain fluid and electrolyte balance

Every day, you lose water through your skin, kidneys, lungs and digestive tract. To keep your body working well, lost water must be replaced.

What fluids and foods provide water?

The fluids that you drink make up about 80% of your water intake. These include:

- water
- milk or juice (fruit or vegetable)
- soup
- sport drinks
- soft drinks
- **coffee and tea**

Despite common belief, caffeinated beverages do not deplete your body of fluid and can count as a fluid source when used in moderation. Non-caffeinated beverages are recommended because caffeine is a stimulant drug.

Foods, especially vegetables and fruit, contribute about 20% of your fluid needs.

- Fresh, frozen or canned fruit such as watermelon, grapes, oranges and apples have high water content.
- Vegetables such as carrots, celery, cucumbers, peppers, lettuce and tomatoes are also high in water.

How much water do I need each day?

Assuming it's an average day with about one hour of physical activity, here are general guidelines for fluid intakes based on age and gender. Remember that these values include the water from food we eat.

Age	Fluid in litres (or cups)
Child 1-8 years	1.3 - 1.7 L (6 c)
Boys, 9-18 years	2.4 - 3.3 L (10-13 c)
Girls, 9-18 years	2.1 - 2.3 L (8-9 c)
Adult males	3.7 L (15 c)
Adult females	2.7 L (11 c)
During pregnancy	3 L (12 c)
While breast feeding	3.8 L (15 c)

Everyone needs more fluid during:

- physical activity or sport
- hot or humid weather
- cold dry weather
- higher altitudes.

Trusted advice from dietitians. www.dietitians.ca

What will happen if I don't drink enough fluids?

If you don't drink enough fluids, you will get dehydrated.

Dehydration leads to:

- poorer mental function
- decreased physical performance
- over-heating (increase in core body temperature)
- stress on your heart, kidneys and other organs

How will I know if I've become dehydrated?

You'll be able to tell if you're getting dehydrated if you're very thirsty, if you feel tired, irritable, dizzy or light-headed or if you seldom need to go to the bathroom. The amount and colour of the urine you pass can also help you to tell if you're dehydrated:

- Small amounts of dark-coloured (apple juice) urine indicates the need for more fluid.
- Plenty of light-coloured urine (i.e. like lemonade) signals good fluid intake.

To avoid dehydration:

- Plan regular fluid intake.
 - Consume water, milk, juice or other fluids with meals, snacks and throughout the day.
 - Carry your personal water bottle for a refreshing drink anytime, anywhere.
- Eat vegetables and fruit throughout the day.
- Include additional fluids before, during and after physical work or play.
- Pay attention to the signs of dehydration, especially when conditions are extreme (i.e. hot and humid or cold and dry).