

Hydration



Why is hydration important?

Water is essential for life! Water makes up, on average, 60% of bodyweight in men and 50-55% in women (because women have more body fat) and plays many different roles in the body including removing waste products in urine and acting as a lubricant and shock absorber in joints.

What happens if I become dehydrated?

If we do not drink enough fluid, over time we become dehydrated. Studies have shown that even low levels of dehydration (1-4%) can cause symptoms like headaches and poor concentration.

When we are dehydrated, the kidneys reduce how much water we lose in the urine. This means that the color of the urine becomes

darker, and our urine color can give us an idea of whether we are well hydrated. If we are drinking enough, our urine should be a straw or pale-yellow color. If it is darker then we probably need more fluid.

Thirst kicks in when the body is already a little dehydrated, so it's important to drink when we are thirsty. However, in older adults the thirst response may be weaker and young children may not be able to tell others they are thirsty and so these groups are more at risk of dehydration and need support to drink regularly.

How much fluid do we need?

The amount of fluid we need depends on many things including the weather, how much physical activity we do and our age. It's recommended we drink about 6-8 glasses of fluid per day. If the weather is hot or we are exercising, we need to drink more.

We can get water from nearly all fluids that we drink, although alcoholic drinks don't count towards your fluid intake as they can make you urinate more than usual.

What are the best (and worst) drinks for hydration?

All non-alcoholic drinks can hydrate us and drinks such as fruit juices and milk also contain essential vitamins and minerals.

However, some drinks, such as soft drinks, can be high in sugars. Drinking a lot of sugary drinks is linked with risk of type 2 diabetes and weight gain in both children and adults.

Physical activity increases the amount of fluid we need to replace the water we lose as sweat. The extra fluid we need depends on how long we are active, how intense the activity is and whether it's hot and humid. It's a good idea to start any physical activity well hydrated and to drink at intervals during activity. Water is fine for rehydration after moderate exercise and most active people do not need special sports drinks to stay hydrated. However, for high intensity exercise that lasts more than 1 hour or so, drinks that contain some sugars and sodium (salt), such as sports drinks or homemade versions, may be better at replacing the extra fluid lost as sweat.

As well as staying hydrated, it's also important to look after our teeth. Consuming sugary drinks too often can harm our teeth. If consumed often, some drinks, such as fizzy drinks and fruit juices are acidic and this can cause dental erosion (damage to tooth enamel).

Key facts about hydration

- Water makes up over half our bodyweight - **fluids are essential for good health.**
- If we are **dehydrated this can make us feel tired**, cause headaches and poor concentration.
- We **need about 6-8 cups or glasses of fluid a day** – more if it is hot or if we are physically active.
- All non-alcoholic drinks, including tea and coffee, can hydrate us but **it's important to make healthy choices.**