

The elixir of life



Dehydration can cause problems in your physical and mental functioning. Know if you are consuming enough water to stay in optimal health

BY MUNMUN GANERIWAL

Water is one of the six main nutrients that our body needs, the other five being fats, protein, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals. Apart from quenching our thirst, it is needed for various body functions.

Energy: Staying hydrated is crucial for both mental and physical endurance. Dehydration not only brings physical fatigue, but also reduction in brain performance. It impairs mood and increases anxiety levels, too.

Skin health: Drinking enough water gives elasticity to skin and keeps it supple. By providing moisture to the skin, it prevents early signs of ageing like wrinkles, fine lines, and sagged skin.

Weight loss: Drinking sufficient water helps boost metabolism and accelerates weight loss or fat burn-

ing in the body. A study published in the *Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism* found that those who drink about 500ml of water will have a 30 per cent increase in metabolic rate. At the same time, mild dehydration can cause metabolism to slow down by as much as 3 per cent.

Detoxification: Water helps cleanse the body. In a dehydrated state, kidneys do not function optimally, causing the build-up of toxins in the body.

Improved digestion: Staying well hydrated helps to address concerns like acidity, indigestion and constipation and improves digestive strength.

Heart health: Water helps maintain blood viscosity, plasma and fibrinogen distribution. Also, since a heart that is well hydrated pumps blood more easily, it also improves circulation.

How much water to drink?

Drinking eight glasses of water is reasonable, but the hydration needs differ from person to person. For some, lesser than eight glasses is fine and for some, more than that may be required. A quick check is to look at your urine colour. It should be colourless. Dark urine implies dehydration.

The amount of water that you should drink on a daily basis depends on your environment, where you live, your activity levels and your current health status. Various factors influence water needs. They are:

Season: As your body loses more moisture than usual, you should make a conscious decision to drink more water. However, avoid refrigerated water as it hampers digestion. Instead, drink *matka* (earthen pot) water. It is naturally cool.

Physical activity: One needs to rehydrate post exercise to make up for the loss of fluids and electrolytes.

Sickness: During fever, vomiting and diarrhoea, water requirements increase due to loss of fluids.

Pregnancy and breast feeding:

The extra physiological demands during these stages of a woman's life require her to have additional fluids to stay hydrated.

Symptoms of inadequate water intake

The first symptom, obviously, is thirst. Then, as mentioned above, dark urine. Also watch out for decreased frequency of urination. As the condition progresses, symptoms like dry mouth, headaches, dizziness, lethargy, constipation and dry skin can also be seen.

Prevention is the best cure for dehydration. Ensure you consume enough fluids, and other food with high water content like cucumbers, watermelons, strawberries, banana, coconut water, buttermilk, tomatoes, pineapple and orange.

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