

Water

It is good to have a reminder of how important and how healthy water is. Even if our British summer is disappointing, there is always a mass exodus of Brits leaving the country for even hotter climates. Do you know how to cope with hotter days?

Water is the main nutrient the body needs. We can only survive for a few days without water and unlike many other nutrients, the body does not store much of it, so we need a daily supply.

An average adult body is made up of about 60% water, for a 72 kg man that means about 42 litres. A young infant body contains as much as 75% water and for older people the level falls to about 50%. The amount of water the body contains is reflected by the amount of lean muscle tissue the body contains.

You might think, where am I storing 42 litres of water? About 2/3 of the water is within our cells and is called – intra cellular fluid. The rest is extra cellular fluid and is found in body fluids like blood and urine.

Our bodies sweat constantly, even on colder days without us knowing; sweating is the body's own temperature control mechanism. Sweat is produced by glands and is largely water. When we are active, or are in a hot climate, the sweat evaporates, cooling the skin. Blood supply that is in contact with the cooled skin then circulates back to the core of the body and helps to cool it down. The hotter the body is, the more we sweat. Without a constant and sufficient supply of water, we cannot sweat and the risk of heat exhaustion will increase. Body water loss above about 10% requires medical intervention!

So how much water do we need to drink?

The daily fluid turnover in an adult is about 2800 ml/day. Some is lost via breath and faeces and about half the amount is lost in urine. How much we sweat varies between individuals and can range between 500 ml to 2 litres per day. It is related to both climate and physical activity level. 500 ml of our daily fluid intake comes from fluid content in food. The recommended intake of fluid from drinks is therefore around 2 litres per day, which equates to about 8 glasses or cups (250 ml) each spread evenly throughout the day. This is a recommendation for adults with moderate activity levels in temperate climate.

So what should we drink?

Tap water is the easiest and cheapest source of fluid. In the UK we have low cost safe tap water delivered directly to our homes. If you do not like the smell or taste of tap water, which is caused by minerals such as calcium and magnesium, there are water filters (jugs or mains water filters) available.

Bottled water – table, mineral, still or sparkling, is a good alternative. Despite safe water, intakes of bottled water remain on the increase in the UK. It costs up to 100 times as much as tap water weight-for-weight and recently there has been a lot of criticism because of the environmental costs of plastic bottles.

Many people believe that the recommendation of 8 glasses of fluid per day should only be water. It is a common misconception that caffeinated drinks don't count toward fluid intake. Research shows that drinking caffeinated beverages in moderation has no negative effect on fluid status; they contribute to fluid just the same way as other beverages. A moderate intake would be five cups of tea/coffee per day.

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There is an array of squashes, juices and fizzy drinks available in our shops. They will contribute to fluid intake. It is best to choose drinks that contain no sugar unless it is a case of surviving.

It is important to have fluid throughout the day – with meals as well as in-between meals. In hotter weather, fluid intake may need to be boosted by around one litre per day, this means an extra 4/5 glasses. Make sure you have access to a drink where ever you go!