Water, Water, Water – Are you getting enough?

By Andrea Raischel, RN

With the hot days of summer fully upon us, we hear more about the importance of staying hydrated. While it is critical to give your body enough water during these summer months, did you know that keeping hydrated is vital to your health and wellbeing all the time?

The body is about 70 percent water. Every cell, tissue, and organ needs water to work properly. For example, muscles are 75 percent water; blood is 82 percent water; the lungs are 90 percent water; the brain is 76 percent water -- even your bones are 25 percent water. Insufficient hydration inhibits your body from performing its many tasks well. As a matter of fact, according to Dr. F. Batmanghelidj, author of *You’re Not Sick You’re Thirsty*, persistent dehydration throws the body into a state of drought. In an effort to survive, cells will draw water from anywhere they can, robbing other areas of the body of necessary fluids.

Dr. Batmanghelidj studied the effects of dehydration for decades and discovered that asthma, allergies, arthritis, hypertension, depression, headaches, diabetes, obesity, many cancers and MS are just some of the conditions and diseases that are caused by persistent dehydration. Dr. B's pioneering work shows that Unintentional Chronic Dehydration (UCD) contributes to, and even produces, pain and many degenerative diseases that can be prevented and treated by increasing regular quality water intake.

Several years ago, my father had high cholesterol and began complaining of arthritis pain. Researching both conditions further, I learned dehydration played a significant role in each of these problems. When I inquired about his water intake, he simply said “I don’t like water! But I drink coffee and cocoa, skim milk, and a glass of wine every evening. I get water in all of those, right?” Sorry to burst your bubble dad but, no, not exactly right. Caffeine, alcohol, processed foods and many medications actually dehydrate you. While some beverages and foods provide the body with necessary water, nothing provides the hydration needs of the body like pure water. I am happy to report my father is now drinking water daily.

Studies show by the time you are thirsty you are already significantly dehydrated. Taking a pro-active approach to hydration by drinking water regularly is the best plan. One of the most common recommendations is to drink 6 to 8, eight-ounce glasses of water daily but, in truth, water needs vary from person to person. Another approach, which I prefer, is to take your body weight, divide it in half, and drink that many ounces of water daily. So, if you weigh 150 pounds, you would need 75 ounces of water daily to stay hydrated. If you are drinking beverages, eating foods and taking medications that dehydrate you, then you have to increase your water intake. A good rule of thumb to follow is the “Two to One Rule.” For every dehydrating beverage you drink, compensate with two glasses of water. This may sound like a lot of water at first, but once you start giving your body the water it needs it won’t seem like so much. Eventually, you will reach for water as your beverage of choice.

Checking your level of hydration can be as easy as looking at the color of your urine. A well-hydrated person will have clear to slightly yellow urine. If you are taking B vitamins, having bright yellow urine is normal. If your urine is dark yellow, orange or brown or has a strong odor, you are likely dehydrated.

Here are some tips to help you stay hydrated:

1. Get in the habit of drinking a glass of water every morning when you first get up. To make it easy, set a glass by your bedside and, when you wake up, drink it before your feet hit the floor.
2. If you don’t like the taste of water, jazz it up with lemon, lime, a sprig of mint, fresh cucumber or watermelon.
3. Carry a water bottle with you at all times. You don’t have to guzzle it. Simply sip often.
4. Drink water before and after exercising.
5. Drink water 30 minutes before and 1 hour after meals. Your body needs water for digestion, but drinking during meals can dilute stomach acids and delay good digestion.
6. Hunger pangs are often a sign you are thirsty not hungry. Before reaching for a snack, try a glass of water.
7. If you prefer your water cold, freeze water bottles ahead of time. This will give you a ready supply of cold water as it melts during the day.
8. When consuming alcohol, use the “Two to One Rule” mentioned above, drinking two glasses of water to every alcoholic beverage. This will not only help prevent dehydration, but also intoxication.
9. Add minerals. Adding an unrefined, raw sea salt to your water will increase its absorption because you need proper mineral balance to stay hydrated. I recommend Redmond’s Real Salt or Celtic Sea.
10. Keep track of your water intake. You might be surprised at how much -- or how little -- you are actually getting.

Staying hydrated is a free and easy way to stay healthy. When we drink enough water, our bodies repay us with better health and more vitality.

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