Prevent Dehydration, Muscle Cramps – Drink Plenty of Water

Do you skip water breaks while exercising? Have you ever felt fatigued, dizzy or cramps while exercising in hot weather? If so, you might need to make some changes in your fluid intake in order to pursue optimal health and performance.

Water plays a vital role in the body. Did you know that about 60-65% of your body is made up of water? For a person weighing 150 pounds, that equals about 90 to 98 pounds of water. Without enough water, we will die.

Why is water so important to the body?

Transportation
Water transports glucose, oxygen and fat to working muscles. It also transports waste products, such as carbon dioxide and lactic acid, away from working muscles.

Body Temperature Regulation
The body needs to keep a constant temperature of 98.6°F. Working muscles generate heat – up to 20 times more heat than when at rest. To prevent overheating, the body regulates temperature by sweating. Water absorbs heat from working muscles, dissipates this heat to circulating blood and then through the skin. Evaporation of the sweat leads to a cooling body temperature.

Digestion, Urine, Lubricant
Water is an important component of saliva and gastric juices, which help digest food. Water transports waste from the body. It is also a good lubricator of joints, organs and tissues.

How much water do I need?

The daily recommended fluid intake is 10-15 8-ounce glasses of water, depending on your age and gender. Female and younger people are at the lower end of the range. Remember, water comes from more than just fluids, it is a major component of many foods. We can estimate that 20% of our water needs are met through foods rather than fluids. Fruits and vegetables are two food groups that have generally high water content. Even meat, bread and dairy products contain some water. Therefore, actual fluid recommendations are 8-13 glasses each day.

What if I don’t drink enough fluids?

Drinking too few fluids can result in dehydration. Some people make the mistake of waiting until they are thirsty before they get something to drink. Thirst is a biological indicator of dehydration; dehydration has already occurred when you become thirsty. Dehydration is caused by:

- Inadequate fluid intake
- Profuse sweating
- Failure to replace lost fluids after exercise
- Exercising in hot weather
- Relying on thirst to hydrate

Dehydration causes the blood volume to drop. This is followed by increased heart rate as it tries to compensate for the decreased blood supply to the organs. Muscle cramps, dizziness and fatigue are caused by dehydration and can increase the risk for injury.

How can I prevent dehydration?

It is very important to hydrate adequately before, during and after exercise to prevent dehydration. The following factors will influence your fluid needs:

- Climate: If the temperature is warm, you will need to drink more water.
- Sweat: Those who sweat easily and in large quantities are at greater risk for dehydration.
- Type and length of activity: The intensity and length of duration of an activity will determine the need for fluids.
- Tip: Keep up with how much water you are drinking. Measure 8 ounces of water and then count how many gulps it takes to drink. Use the number of gulps as a guideline while exercising.

Remember, it takes 24-36 hours after dehydration to fully recover the muscular strength and endurance lost due to dehydration.