

Drink Up, It's Almost Summertime

Tallahassee Democrat

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Okay, so it's only the middle of May, but it will be hot, very hot; very soon! With hot weather comes the increased risk of dehydration, especially for older adults.

Did you know?

- One third of healthy persons 65 years or older are mildly dehydrated?
- More than half of the adult human body's weight is water?
- Adults can lose up to 16 cups of water a day – that's the same amount of liquid as in a gallon carton of milk? One and a half cups of water may be lost just from breathing.

Water is the medium of all the cells in our body. It brings nutrients to cells and removes wastes. Our bodies can not function properly without sufficient water. Water helps to control our body's temperature, build new cells, protect and cushion our joints and organs and keep us "regular".

Our body is losing water all day; everyday and if we don't take in enough fluid it becomes dehydrated. Water is eliminated from our body in urine, sweat and feces. Older persons with illnesses and/or other physical limitations are at an increased risk for dehydration as fever, excessive bleeding, diarrhea and other conditions may contribute to an increase in the loss of body fluid.

- ✓ Dry mouth & swallowing difficulties due to low saliva production
- ✓ Increased body temperature, breathing, pulse rate
- ✓ Headaches, fatigue, dizziness, weakness, seizures
- ✓ Loss of appetite
- ✓ Dry eyes
- ✓ Muscle cramps
- ✓ Urinary stone disease
- ✓ Constipation

For older persons some of the consequences of dehydration may lead more serious complications. For example, loss of appetite and swallowing difficulties may contribute to poor nutrition. The lack of fluids may more quickly result in electrolyte imbalance, seizure, hospitalization and possibly death. Dehydration is common in older persons and one of the main reasons is because of the decrease in thirst mechanism. As we age we just don't feel the thirst sensation as keenly as when we are younger.

Fluid needs (about 6 to 8 cups per day) can be met by drinking water and other beverages. We need to drink fluids that we enjoy, but limit those that are high in sugar and sodium. Fruit juices (100% juice, about 6 oz a day), low sodium vegetable juices, soups, and low/no fat milk are some recommendations. Carbonated fluids, coffee and tea can also contribute to daily fluid intake. Research results are contradictory with respect to whether or not caffeinated beverages count as fluid intake, but the current recommendation from the Institute of Medicine supports including caffeinated beverages in total daily fluid intake.

Don't forget, we can quench some of the body's thirst by eating foods, especially fruits and vegetables. Juicy watermelon, cantaloupe, oranges, tomatoes as well as broccoli, corn and even the potato are good sources of fluids.

In a recent e-newsletter The American Institute for Cancer Research encouraged, “. . . have a safe, well-hydrated summer. Just keep in mind that in the end, your healthiest option is also the cheapest and most plentiful: plain old water”.

To determine if you might be at risk for dehydration see the UF IFAS Extension publication, “Healthy Living: Are You at Risk for Dehydration?” <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/FY998>

Resources:

American Institute for Cancer; http://www.aicr.org/site/MessageViewer?em_id=4681.0

Dr. Linda Bobroff, UF IFAS Extension; <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/FY070>

UF IFAS Extension, Elder Nutrition and Food Safety; <http://enafs.ifas.ufl.edu/>