

# Water

## One of the most vital ingredients for life, but are we getting enough of it?

### Why do we need so much?

Water is such an obvious requirement of the body and yet so many people overlook it. Our bodies are 75% water and our brains 85% water. Water is required for every chemical process that takes place in the body, such as digestion and hormone distribution; it plays an important structural role too, providing lubrication and cushioning for joints. A loss of just 1% of our body water really starts to impair our functioning and just 5% loss constitutes severe dehydration. Effects of even mild but persistent dehydration include:

- Tiredness and lethargy
- Poorer concentration
- Headaches
- Dyspepsia (digestive pains)
- Constipation
- Ulcers
- Aching and stiff joints
- Back pain
- Higher blood cholesterol
- Lower immune system
- Duller skin

Just think of how you have felt with a hangover. Most of those symptoms are due to severe dehydration rather than the toxic effects of alcohol, most of which are experienced the night before! Regular dehydration is like having a mild hangover on a daily basis.

### Why are we all so dehydrated?

The body needs 2 to 3 litres of water a day, depending on climate and activity levels. As days are hotter we lose more water through perspiration and simply through breathing.

Our society has undervalued water as a drink and we are sold hundreds of different beverages such as tea, coffee, carbonated drinks, juice drinks, squashes and cordials, hardly any of which hydrate the body. In fact most produce a negative balance of water, as they draw on the body's reserves to eliminate the sugar and chemicals in them.

In addition, the phosphorous in carbonated drinks is acidic and thus calcium is leached from your bones, to balance your blood pH. This can impair development in children and contribute to osteoporosis in later life.

We have also gradually lost our recognition of our thirst reflex. It is most commonly mistaken for hunger and is often suppressed by painkillers. Most pain in the body that cannot be easily attributed to an injury is a localised call for water.

Thus, not only does thirst go unrecognised, when we do drink it is often contributing to dehydration.

## I can't drink 2 litres a day!

It sounds a lot to drink but it can be easy if you spread it out through the day:

- First of all, have a *large* (300-500ml) glass upon waking and think of it as your morning internal shower. This is the most important drink as your kidneys and liver are working hardest when you wake. *After* that, have your tea or coffee if you feel you need it.
- Carry a small bottle of water with you to have on the tube or bus. There are many varieties in a 500ml size that are not too cumbersome.
- Keep a bottle of water on your desk and sip it through the day instead of tea or coffee.
- If you feel peckish even though you have eaten, it is probably a thirst reflex. Have a glass of water and then see if you are still hungry 20 minutes later.
- Have another glass of water whilst you are preparing dinner or waiting for it to arrive. This is better than drinking with your food as it can dilute your digestive juices.
- Have another glass before you go to bed.
- Remember that if you are exercising you will need more water to make up for increased respiration and perspiration. Your performance will be greater if you are well hydrated *before* you start exercising rather than pushing yourself when dehydrated and trying to make up for it afterwards.

## The Benefits

If you are not convinced already and still find the thought of drinking lots of water boring, bear in mind the following:

### You will have:

- More energy
- Clearer Skin
- Less pain
- Better digestion
- Better concentration

### Drinking Water:

- Is free (well mostly)
- Helps you lose weight
- Helps prevent long term illnesses such as arthritis, hypertension, colitis, heart disease and angina.

## Recommended Reading:

Your Body's Many Cries for Water, Dr Batmanghelidji, Tagman Press, ISBN 0-9530921-6-x