

## **Naperville dietician offers tips to staying hydrated**

By Nicki Anderson, July 27, 2011

“Water is the driving force of all nature.”

Leonardo da Vinci

The last time I was in Arizona, my aunt never had a shortage of water bottles on hand. I asked her, “What did people do before water bottles?” She assumed canteens were used, or people likely didn’t drink water unless they were home. But today, that has all changed.

You can have bottled water delivered, pick up a bottle in a convenience store or grab a bottle from your fridge. Either way, we’re very lucky to have water that is readily available.

With the stifling heat this past week, hydration should be a goal for everyone, young and old. And if you add exercise to the equation, it’s even more important.

“When we are not well hydrated, we feel fatigued, irritable and unproductive,” said **Christine Palumbo**, Naperville-based registered dietitian and contributing editor to *Environmental Nutrition* newsletter. “Mild dehydration also may give us a headache.”

For our older relatives or neighbors, hydration can be a serious issue.

“Older people often restrict their fluids due to worry they may need to get to a bathroom quickly,” Palumbo said. “As we age, we lose our fine-tuned thirst sensation. Dehydration is one of the most common causes of hospitalization for people over the age of 65.”

If you exercise regularly, it’s vital to stay well hydrated, especially when the temperatures climb toward 100 degrees.

“Athletes who fail to drink enough to compensate for the fluid they lose through sweat and respiration may not perform up to par,” Palumbo said. “People who work out need to especially be aware of their need to replenish the fluids they’ve lost in sweat. The amount, however, is highly variable depending on your size, the duration and intensity of your workout, as well as the temperature at which you’re working out.”

The old adage of drinking 8 to 10 8-ounce glasses of water per day is no longer the rule of thumb, Palumbo said.

“Checking your urine is far more accurate,” she said. “Monitor the color of your urine, the more pale it is the better. Strive for urine the color of lemon juice or straw.”

Palumbo said even those who are sedentary, or sit in an office all day, still need to monitor their hydration levels. When there is high heat or dry air — such as air-conditioning in the summer and heating in the winter, this increases the body's need for water. Dehydration can actually increase the risk for painful kidney stones. Additionally, chronic dehydration is linked to urinary tract infections, bladder cancer and other conditions. Bottom line? Stay hydrated!

The type of hydration is often debated. Is it only water? Can it be tea? Soda? Coffee? I was schooled to believe that those options had a diuretic affect and to avoid them, but Palumbo offered a different perspective.

“Caffeine is only a mild diuretic, so coffee, tea and other caffeinated drinks can count toward your daily liquid intake, She said. “For most of us, our body becomes acclimated to the slight dehydrating effects of caffeine. So, the water that goes into the coffee, still ‘counts’ toward our water needs.”

Palumbo wouldn't opt for soda as a first choice for hydration, regardless if it's regular or sugar free. She said the sugar in regular soda reduces its ability to hydrate. Further, studies show that drinking diet pop is associated with being overweight. Two good reasons to nix diet soda.

If you're not a big water lover, Palumbo shares some great suggestions.

“Make spa water! Fill a big pitcher with tap water (or bottled, if you prefer) and add one of the following: fresh mint leaves, sliced strawberries, sliced cucumbers, sliced oranges, lemons, limes or even grapefruit. You can even add a medley of berries such as blackberries, blueberries and strawberries. Vegetables or herbs add a surprising amount of flavor without any calories. You can also opt for sparkling water or club soda (most no longer have added sodium) with a twist of lime or lemon.”

Don't forget that about half the fluid our bodies need can be found in healthy solid food choices such as fruits and vegetables, including cucumbers, strawberries, lettuce, tomatoes, citrus fruit, zucchini and, my personal favorite, watermelon. Healthy, hydrating foods!

Don't let the heat get you down this summer, spice up your water with some of the suggestions mentioned above and remember to keep water close at hand to keep your body cool and hydrated! Before we know it, we'll be shoveling snow!

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