

IMPORTANCE OF WATER IN A DIET

Overview

Did you know that drinking one glass of water before sleeping helps in avoiding a stroke or heart attack, and that taking one glass of water before bathing helps lower blood pressure? We all know the common phrase, “Water is life”. We cannot live without it, but how exactly does water make life possible?

Water does more than just quench your thirst and regulate body temperature. Its benefits include:

Helping in Digestion

By drinking a glass of water 30 minutes before eating, you can prevent constipation. However, not only does water help in digestion, by preventing constipation, it also assists the entire process, from when food is ingested, and chewing begins, to the point of excretion. Saliva, which has water as its basis, contains enzymes which help to break down food.

Water makes minerals and nutrients more accessible to the body. It also makes fibres dissolve which, in turn, helps in making stool soft and easy to pass from the body.

Providing adequate hydration

The body loses water or fluid through various ways such as breathing, perspiration or sweating, urination and bowel movements. By taking lots of water, the body remains hydrated.

Breastfeeding mothers also lose water because the water in their body is utilized in the production of milk and to remain hydrated, drinking more water is essential.

Aiding in removal of waste from the body

Waste removal from the body is very important and drinking adequate amounts of water helps in the removal of waste through sweating, urinating and defecation. Water is used by the liver, kidneys and intestines to flush out waste. Without enough water in the body, you may experience constipation because water is what softens stools.

Lack of water may also cause urinary tract infections (UTIs) because there is inadequate water to dilute the urine and prevent the urine from corroding the urinary tract, especially when one is being treated with antibiotics. If you have a UTI, water can help in flushing out the bacteria that cause the infection.

Protecting the tissues, spinal cord and joints

Drinking enough water helps to keep not only the body tissues moist, but also other essential areas of the body such as the spinal cord, joints, blood, bones and the brain. Water helps the joints remain lubricated preventing stiffening and enabling smooth movement between the bones. Water is essential for the blood, enabling it to transport oxygen and nutrients to all parts of the body.

Protecting the tissues, spinal cord and joints

People who are looking to lose weight are often advised to take more water. Why? When the body does not get enough water, it retains the water it has, using a mechanism to hold on to water it will need in the future. Once it starts to get a steady supply of water, it begins to release the retained water stored in the face, waist and ankles after which the water is released from the body.

Drinking a glass of water 30 minutes before meals can help you feel less empty and more satisfied eating less food. If you snack a lot, you can take more water in place of snacks to relieve the snack craving.

Other benefits of water in a diet are:

- Maintaining electrolyte balance which helps in regulating muscle activity,
- Boosting physical performance,
- Acting as a component of body fluids such as tears and mucus, and
- Giving cells shape and stability.

How do you know whether you are drinking enough water or not?

These are some of the signs that indicate a lack of adequate water in the body:

- Dark coloured urine,
- Persistent thirst,
- Headache,
- Dry lips and tongue,
- Increased pulse rate, and
- Sleepiness.

Water drinking tips

People who are not accustomed to drinking water may decide to drink the required amount all at once, perhaps in the morning or evening or at some other time they find suitable.

However, drinking water is somewhat a skill. The recommended quantity of water to drink is at least 6-8 glasses a day but that does not mean you should gulp all those glasses down at once. So, what tips should you use to drink water?

- Carry a reusable water bottle around with you,
- Set a reminder, or use an app, to remind you to take water'
- Consider using a water bottle with measurement markers to help you keep track of the amounts you are consuming,
- Add fruits such as lemons, oranges and berries to your water to give it flavour making it more palatable for you to drink water, and
- Include other fluids such as tea into our diet.

Water is part of a balanced diet and so, if you are not drinking enough water, you are not having a balanced diet. Water makes up 57-60% of the adult body and 75-78% of an infant's body. You can go for weeks without food but only a few days without water. The importance of

water in a diet cannot be stressed enough. Drink enough water, drink your way to better health.