

Nutrition News

Information for Senior Citizens

Developed by Colorado State University Extension
Department of Food Science & Human Nutrition

Water: Why is it so Important?

How many times have you heard the advice, "Drink 6 to 8 glasses of water a day."? Have you ever wondered "Why? How could I possibly need that much water? What's so important about water, anyway?" Water has no calories, no vitamins, no minerals, and no food value of any kind. So, why on earth should we drink so much water?

Well, did you know . . .

- ❖ If a person weighs 150 lbs, about 90 lbs is water.
- ❖ The human body needs more water than any other nutrient.
- ❖ Almost all the life processes of our body occur in the water that bathes our cells.
- ❖ Water and minerals are carefully balanced by our bodies; our health depends on this balance.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

- 1 Water: Why is it so Important?
- 2 Thirst: Does Your Body Know When it Needs Water?
- 2 Decreasing Water Intake is not a Cure for Incontinence
- 3 Recipe: Slim Cherry Crumble
- 3 Recipe: New Noodle Soup
- 4 Fitness Focus: Flexibility
- 4 Senior Resource: Food Stamps

Minerals, vitamins, and many other small molecules in your body are dissolved in water. These body fluids lubricate our joints, act as shock absorbers, and help cool us in hot weather.

Water is necessary for our bodies to get rid of the wastes produced during the digestion of food. Your kidneys must have enough water to carry off these wastes--this is called obligatory water excretion, and it requires about a pint of water every day.

An additional two quarts of water are lost each day as water vapor when you breathe, as perspiration (or sweat), and in your stools, where it helps prevent constipation.

Alcohol and many medicines lead to even more water loss, or *dehydration*. Caffeinated beverages cause some fluid loss, but they do not cause dehydration.

Now it should be clear why we need so much water daily. Of course, there is some water in our foods and beverages, but there is no substitute for plain water.



Thirst: Does Your Body Know When it Needs Water?

Your body's need for water is controlled by your thirst mechanism—when you need water, an area in your brain causes you to feel thirsty. This mechanism is not as reliable as other mechanisms, such as hunger. Scientists are working to understand why we often have a need for water without feeling thirsty.

The area of the brain that causes thirst may become less sensitive with age. This means older persons may feel thirst less often and are more likely to become dehydrated.

Dehydration causes your blood to become thicker than normal and upsets the delicate water balance of the body. It can lead to rapid heartbeat, a drop in blood pressure, and interfere with obligatory water excretion.

It's easy to forget how important water is for health. Try to make a conscious effort each day to drink the water your body needs, especially in warm weather or when you are active.

It's a good idea to sip water regularly throughout the day. Since thirst lags behind the need for water, it's hard to remember to drink enough. If you're not sure how much water you drink, try filling up two one-quart jars with water in the morning and use them for your drinking water through the day. If they are empty by evening, you'll know you drank 8 glasses of water.

If you're not in the habit of drinking water regularly, it's best to increase your intake gradually. Start with two or three glasses a day and slowly increase by half a glass a day until you are drinking 6 - 8 glasses each day.

Decreasing Water Intake is not a Cure for Incontinence

Sometimes, older individuals who are concerned about incontinence try to prevent their bladders from filling up by drinking less water. The truth is however, that your bladder is going to fill up regardless of how much water you drink. Your kidneys *must* get rid of body wastes and will steal water from other areas of the body if you don't provide them with the water they need. The only thing decreasing your water intake is going to do is cause dehydration.

A better solution would be to rely on absorbent undergarments; this solves the problem without risk of dehydration and allows you to remain active and healthy. Incontinence must not cause you to lose sight of your daily need for water.

If you are taking any medications, it would be a good idea to check with your doctor to see if they cause water loss. This is called a *diuretic effect*, and it can lead not only to dehydration, but also loss of important minerals such as potassium. Your doctor can tell you whether you need to drink more water or use mineral supplements.

If you have any questions about drinking water, water safety in your area, dehydration, or diuretics, call your local county Cooperative Extension office. They can answer questions and refer you to professionals for help.

Quick Tip:

Drink water in excess – alcohol in moderation.

Slim Cherry Crumble

Ingredients:

- 1/4 cup flour, unsifted
- 1/4 cup rolled oats (regular or quick-cooking)
- 1/4 cup brown sugar, packed
- 2 Tbsp butter or margarine, melted
- 1 can cherry pie filling

Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Stir together flour, oats, and brown sugar until well mixed. Add melted butter, and mix thoroughly till crumbly.
3. Spread cherry pie filling evenly in an 8" round cake pan. Cover with crumb topping.
4. Bake 30-35 minutes.

Yields: 4 servings

(Pyramid Servings per portion: 1 bread, 1 fruit. Nutrient information per portion: 292 cal, 6 grams fat, 15 mg chol, 3 grams fiber, 73 mg sodium, 220 mg potassium, 3 mg iron.)

Here's a quick soup for lunch or dinner. It can be made with oriental noodles, as well as pasta, and any kind of frozen vegetable. Just keep a supply of frozen vegetables, noodles, and reduced-sodium chicken broth on hand, and you can have hot soup in 10 minutes! Soups are quick to make and nutritious. Add a whole-wheat roll and a glass of skim milk for a satisfying meal. Enjoy!

New Noodle Soup

Ingredients:

- 1 can reduced-sodium chicken broth
- 2 oz enriched egg noodles (1 1/2 cups)
- 2 cups frozen mixed broccoli & cauliflower
- 1 Tbsp dried minced onion
- 1/2 tsp garlic powder (not garlic salt)

Directions:

1. Bring broth to boil in 3-quart sauce pan.
2. Add noodles, vegetables, onion, and garlic powder.
3. Cook about 8 minutes until noodles are tender.

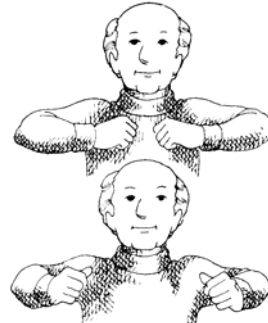
Yield: 2 servings

(Pyramid Servings: 3 bread, 2 veg, 1 protein. Nutrient information per portion: 309 cal, 14 grams fat, 77 mg chol, 6 grams fiber, 510 mg sodium, 375 mg potassium)

Fitness Focus: Flexibility

It's back to flexibility again this month. Staying supple can help prevent stiffness and back pain and allow you to work and exercise without straining muscles and tendons. An exercise that can be performed seated is the Alphabet Toe. In a seated position, point your right foot and use the big toe to draw the letter "A". Then draw all the other letters of the alphabet. When you finish, start over with the left foot. This stretches and strengthens every muscle in the foot and ankle, and also strengthens the lower leg muscles.

Below are two more stretches, for your shoulders and chest. Be sure to check with your doctor before starting a new exercise program.



1. Reach: to stretch shoulder girdle and rib cage. Take a deep breath, extend arms overhead. If standing, rise on toes while reaching. Exhale slowly, dropping arms. Can be done in a seated position. Suggested repetitions: 6 - 8.

2. Chain Breaker: to stretch chest muscles. Stand erect, feet about six inches apart. Tighten leg muscles, tighten stomach by drawing it in, shove hips forward, extend chest, bring arms up with clenched fists chest high, take deep breath, let it out slowly. Slowly pull arms back as far as possible keeping elbows chest high. Suggested repetitions: 8 - 10.

--Copyright 1992, American Association of Retired Persons. Reprinted with permission.

Senior Resource: Are medical expenses deductible from income in determining eligibility for the Food Stamp program?

Yes, a household may deduct all medical expenses for elderly or disabled members exceeding \$35 a month if the household has at least one person:

- who is 60 or older, or
- who received SSI benefits or disability payments under the Social Security Act; or
- who is a disabled veteran, a disabled surviving spouse of a veteran, or a disabled surviving child of a veteran.

Deductions are subtracted from the adjusted income. Households with elderly or disabled members may deduct all shelter costs that is more than 50 percent of the household's adjusted income.

For more information and to find out if you or someone you know qualifies for food stamps, call 1-800-221-5689.