

Experts respond to readers' questions with helpful suggestions and information.

**Q:** Why is drinking water so important, especially during the summer and how much should we have? How can I encourage my family to drink more water?

Sydney Harper, Avondale

**A:** The human body is made up of 72% water. Water also composes 75% of your brain, 83% of your blood, 22% of your bones, 75% of your muscles, 80% of your skin and 90% your lungs. Because water accounts for so much of your body composition, it is important for many of its functions including:

- Increasing energy
- Increasing metabolism/promoting weight loss
- Helping to build and repair muscles
- Promoting healthy skin and complexion
- Boosting your immune system
- Flushing toxins out of your body
- Maintaining pH balance in the body
- Aiding digestion by forming saliva
- Prevents constipation
- Regulating your body temperature
- Promotes mental clarity and improved focus
- Protecting joints and organs
- Helps deliver oxygen to your body

If the body does not receive enough fluid to replace what it loses, it can become dehydrated. The signs and symptoms may differ by age, but typical indicators are:



- Dry mouth and tongue
- Extreme thirst
- Less frequent urination
- No wet diapers for three hours
- Dark-colored urine
- Listlessness or irritability
- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Confusion
- Inability to focus or think clearly
- Lack of tears when crying
- Sunken eyes and cheeks
- Sunken soft spot on top of skull

Thirst is not always a reliable early indicator of dehydration. Warmer weather, dryer climates, illness, exercising and flying can all cause the body's need for water to increase. Many children and adults do not feel thirsty until they are already dehydrated. That's why it is important to increase water intake during these circumstances, even before you feel thirsty.

Regarding the minimum recommended daily amount of water to drink, as a rule of thumb, divide your weight in pounds by 2 and that would equal the amount of water to drink in ounces each day. As a Certified Health Coach, I always recommend my clients drink a minimum of 64 ounces per day, but I ask them to aim for at least 100 ounces or more per day, especially if they are active or desiring to lose weight.

It is best to drink water throughout the day, but certain times can be especially beneficial: having two glasses after waking up is good for internal organs, one glass 30 minutes before meals is good for digestion, and one glass before going to bed is good for your heart and blood.

Water has no calories and there are many options on the market now for flavored water (recommend natural flavored, not artificial sweetened, with very low or no calories). Other ways to make drinking fun and more tasteful could be infusing the water with berries, cucumbers, lemons, limes, etc. or freezing ice cubes with berries in them. You could use a cool-looking water bottle and/or straw to help promote drinking. There are apps and bottles that track your water consumption and you could set up a reward system or make it a fun game or competition. Educate your family about thirst and urine color and teach children how to serve water to themselves. Most importantly, lead by example and be a water role model to your family. ■

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