

SCHOOL HEALTH

Betty Sue Hinkson RN, School Nurse

THE IMPORTANCE OF ADEQUATE WATER FOR HEALTH

We all know that water is good for us, but few people are as well-hydrated as they should be. Water is essential to good health, and costs virtually nothing. The benefits of drinking adequate water are numerous. It helps build muscle, lubricates joints, flushes out waste, promotes healthy skin and tissue, cools the body, it is necessary for good digestion and the absorption of vitamins and nutrients, and detoxifies the liver and kidneys. Water is the main component of blood, gastric juice, saliva and urine. Every cell in the body requires water to function.

In contrast, dehydration thickens the blood causing the body to work harder, the brain is less active, and the body becomes fatigued and stressed.

The signs and symptoms of dehydration are

- Headaches and migraines
- lower back pain
- neck pain
- depression
- tired/irritable
- dry mouth, dry skin, flushed skin
- thirst
- dizziness
- increased body temperature
- low blood pressure
- rapid pulse
- muscle cramps

If you wait until you are thirsty - you waited too long! You are already dehydrated! Low-level chronic dehydration is common.

So how much water do you need? It varies depending on your size and activity level, but the general rule of thumb is 8 (8 ounce) glasses per day or a total of about 64 ounces. If you are overweight you need an additional 8 ounces for every 25 pounds they are overweight. If you are physically active you lose about 4 cups or 32 ounces per hour of exercise depending on your size and perspiration rate, so make sure to add more.

Will any drink do? No! Caffeinated beverages make you more dehydrated. Caffeine acts on the kidneys and causes increased urine production. This is why a person will drink many cups of soda every day and not be satisfied. The water does not stay in the body long enough. If you do drink beverages with caffeine in them be sure to increase your intake of water.

What about sports drinks? They do not usually provide any additional benefit unless you participate in endurance activities lasting 60 minutes or more. For the average person they only add unnecessary calories in the form of sugar to his/her diet.

