

## Get Water Wise

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With all of the snazzy beverages that proliferate store shelves these days, it seems that good old water has become passe. Indeed, the thought of Perrier or Evian (not to mention tap water) seems boring compared to sipping a Ginseng Green Tea Infusion or a Super Cool Coolata.

Yet water does wonders for our health, and Americans would do well to drink more of it. The human body is nearly 2/3 water, and as little as a 2% water loss can impair both our physical and mental abilities. Water is also important in muscle and kidney function, can decrease the risk of kidney stones, improves skin tone, flushes toxins from the body and helps to reduce constipation. And as an added plus, water is a great weapon in the battle of the bulge: it contains zero calories, fills you up, and keeps you from drinking other high-calorie beverages (say a Super Cool Coolata).

Most healthy adults should consume 8-10 cups of water (64-80 oz) daily. You will need to drink even more water in hot weather, when exercising, or if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. And be sure that you and your family can recognize the onset of dehydration: early signs include a sense of thirst, dry lips, headache, fatigue and constipation. Another helpful indicator of hydration status is urine color: the darker the urine, the less hydrated you are. If you experience any of these symptoms on a regular basis, chances are you need to increase the amount of water that you consume.

Many people wait until they are thirsty to take a drink. This is a common mistake, because by the time you feel a sense of thirst you are already dehydrated. And since our thirst receptors become less sensitive as we age, this is an especially poor strategy for the elderly.

Remember that plain and sparkling water, clear soups and herbal teas all count towards your daily water goal. However, beverages which contain caffeine (such as soda and coffee) or alcohol (such as beer, wine and spirits) do not count. This is because caffeine and alcohol are both diuretics and can actually increase your body's water losses. Fruit juices, milk and fresh fruit (watermelon is 95% water) are also sources of water in the diet. Patients undergoing dialysis, taking diuretics, or other fluid-altering drugs should consult a physician or dietitian to determine their specific fluid needs.



So whether you are out on the playing field or sitting behind a desk, you will not perform at your best if you aren't well hydrated. Your best bet is to take a proactive approach to being water wise, and to swap the trendy beverages for something that is going to pack a healthier punch. Here are some strategies to help you fit more water into your diet:

- Get into the habit of drinking several glasses a day as part of your routine (i.e. when you brush your teeth in the morning, or while you watch the evening news).
- Keep a bottle of water at your desk at work and make sure to drink from it often.
- Choose sparkling water instead of soda or alcoholic drinks when at a party or social gathering. If you do choose to drink something else, alternate plain or sparkling water between drinks.
- Be sure to drink plenty of water before, during and after exercise, and in hot weather.
- Make water glasses a regular part of the family's breakfast and dinner table.
- Make sure that children and the elderly are offered water frequently throughout the day.