

Ask an Expert: Six Tips for Staying Hydrated This Summer



Summer is a great time to be outside – but proper precautions must be taken. It is especially important to stay hydrated as temperatures rise. Heat exhaustion and heat stroke are serious health conditions, but they can be avoided.

Water is a major component in the make up of the human body. Along with other functions, the body requires water to flush toxins out of vital organs and carry nutrients to the cells. Without enough water, dehydration can cause stress on the body, bringing about feelings of fatigue, light-headedness or throbbing headaches as the body loses the ability to cool down properly.

Consider these six tips to keep summertime dehydration at bay.

*** Be aware of weather conditions** - Even if it is cloudy and breezy, hot summer temperatures can still cause water loss. After the sun goes down, while temperatures hover in the 70-to-80 degree range, your body will remain warm and need hydration when you are outside, regardless of whether you are working or sitting.

*** Consider the level of activity** - According to Mayo Clinic (<http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/nutrition-and-healthy-eating/>), if you exercise or engage in any activity that makes you sweat, you need to drink extra water to compensate for fluid loss. An extra 1.5 to 2.5 cups of water should suffice for short bouts of exercise, but intense exercise lasting more than an hour requires more fluid intake. How much additional fluid you need depends on how much you sweat and the duration and type of exercise.

*** Drink plenty of liquids** - While water is the best overall source of hydration, additional beverages such as milk and juice are composed mostly of water. After extended periods of exercise, some minerals and electrolytes need to be replenished. A banana and water with a bit of salt added will work, as will a sports drink. However, most sports drinks have refined sugar which adds calories, and the dye can cause allergies for some people.

*** Avoid caffeinated beverages** - Drinking iced tea or caffeinated sodas counts toward liquid intake. However, because of the diuretic effect of caffeine, these beverages may cause an increase in water loss through the urine. Especially when exercising or spending extended time in the sun, water is still the best overall choice to keep hydrated. Energy drinks are not a viable option for hydration, due to the high caffeine content.

*** Eat foods with high water content** - Fluid intake can be easily complemented by eating foods with a high water content. Watermelon, cantaloupe and strawberries are among fruits with the highest water content. Containing slightly less water are raspberries, pineapple, plums, apricots and peaches. Apples, cherries, grapes and pears are also good choices.

Among vegetables with high water content, cucumbers and iceberg lettuce come in highest, and celery, tomatoes and zucchini are next. Then comes broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, sweet peppers and spinach. Carrots and peas are also good (www.livestrong.com).

*** Dress wisely** - Not all summer clothing is created equal for keeping you cool. The best overall fabric is made of cotton, which allows air to circulate. This makes heat more bearable. Other good fabric choices are linen and rayon. Most t-shirts, shorts and skirts use blends of two or more fabrics. Cotton blended with polyester, spandex or nylon can still keep you cool and wick moisture away from the body.

Summertime is a great time to enjoy the outdoors. Keeping your body healthy and hydrated will help increase your enjoyment.

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