



Health Topics

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Hydration: getting enough water

Not getting enough fluids to drink may not sound like a problem, but for many people it may be a major concern. As you get older, your body's warning signals become less obvious. When you are young, if you drink only when you are thirsty you will probably get enough water. But by the time you are 60, if you drink only when you are thirsty you may get only about 90 percent of the fluids you need.

After about age 50, you need to drink fluids even when you are not thirsty. This is particularly important if you have retired to an area of the country that is more humid, or at a higher altitude than you are used to.

The amount of fluids needed each day depends on age, gender, activity level, weather, the health of the person, the number and type of medications being taken, and the quality of their diet. Because food contains water, about 3 to 4 cups of water by the body comes from the food eaten each day. Part of the body's water also comes from other fluids such as milk, juice, soup and even coffee, tea, and alcohol. But it is important to limit the amount of caffeine, sugar or alcohol in our diet to the recommended amounts in order to stay healthy.

Thirst is not always a very good indicator of the body's need for more fluids. As we get older, our sense of thirst becomes less sensitive. A quick way to tell if you are getting enough fluids is to look at the color of your urine. The urine should be a pale yellow. If your urine is dark yellow and has a strong odor or if you go to the bathroom more than four times a day, you probably need to drink more fluids.

So how much fluid should you drink each day? Drink 6 to 8 eight-ounce glasses of water or other fluids, or half of the body weight in ounces, each day as part of your normal diet. The amount of fluids needed by the body increases when you are active, when the weather gets warmer and more humid. More fluids may be helpful when you have a fever, congestion from a cold or cough or other medical conditions. Some medical problems require that fluid intake be limited. It is important to know how much fluid you need to drink. Discuss the daily amount of fluid you need with your provider if you have a diagnosed health problem.

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