

WHY DRINK WATER?

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A number of patients coming into the office have been suffering from a variety of symptoms, all of which can be traced to a lack of water intake. Most were drinking plenty of fluids: coffee, soda, tea and juice. But none were drinking enough water.

What kinds of symptoms result from drinking too little water? Most commonly I see constipation, dry and itchy skin, acne, nose bleeds, repeated urinary tract infections, dry and unproductive coughs, constant sneezing, sinus pressure and headaches.

You might ask how a lack of water intake could cause this wide array of symptoms. Water is required by every cell in the body as nourishment and to remove wastes. When water becomes scarce, the body tries to limit the amount it loses through breathing, mucous production, urination, perspiration and bowel movements.

Several cups of water are lost daily through breathing because the lungs require humid air to do their work. In the winter when drier air prevails outside and heating systems (especially forced hot air and wood stoves) dry out the air inside, even more water is lost. It is estimated that on an average day in the fall, 3-4 cups of water are lost through breathing. On a cold, dry winter day as much as 2-3 more cups of water may be lost in this way. The body has to moisturize the air before it reaches the lungs and does so through the mucous membranes lining the nasal passages and the bronchi. As available fluid decreases, the mucous lining becomes drier. This in turn irritates the lungs, causing them to become more reactive to dust, mold particles, cigarette smoke and other irritants, and less resistant to viruses and bacteria. The result: dry cough and bronchitis.

The mucous membranes of our lungs and gut are an important component of our resistance to disease. They provide an effective barrier to bacteria, viruses and pollutants when intact. But a number of substances (such as aspirin) are known to harm this barrier. What is less well known is that a lack of water in the body makes the all-important mucous less viscous and can cause constipation, irritable bowel syndrome and a slowed movement of the

bowels contents. These problems in turn increase ones risk of other long-term disease including hemorrhoids and colon cancer. The mucous lining in the sinus passages is similarly vital as a defense against disease. When it becomes drier, sinusitis, nose bleeds and allergic symptoms worsen.

Obviously, we all lose some water through urination and urination is required for the removal of various toxins from the body. When fluid volume is diminished, the ability of the body to remove toxins through urination is also diminished. It is a common misunderstanding that the more water we drink, the harder it is on the kidneys. In fact, except for people with some uncommon kidney problems, the opposite is true. Water-soluble toxins cannot be easily removed through the bowels, especially when a lack of water also causes constipation. These toxins then must be eliminated in other ways such as through the skin. The increase in body toxin levels can cause headaches and fatigue. The attempt by the body to remove excess levels of unwanted chemicals through the skin can cause acne and will aggravate eczema.

The easy solution to all these problems is to drink more water. Coffee, tea and soda all contain caffeine, which is a known diuretic and will actually accentuate the symptoms of fluid loss. Fruit juices are more concentrated in sugar than your body's fluids and so the body will attempt to dilute them in the gut thereby causing a loss of water from other areas of the body. In the dry, hot air of winter and very hot days of summer, drink at least 10 glasses of water daily for optimal health. During the spring and fall, 8 glasses will suffice for most people, although those with inhalant allergies do best to drink as much water as possible. Pregnant women need to drink at least 50% more water daily than they would while not pregnant. People who exercise vigorously should add one glass of water for each 30 minutes of exercise. Herbal teas and diluted fruit juices (1/3 fruit juice to 2/3 water) can be substituted for some of the water. Drink one extra glass of water for each cup of coffee or black tea you have. Humidifying the air in the winter will help reduce water loss, but be careful to clean

humidifiers daily to discourage bacteria or mold build up.

What type of water is best? Activated carbon or charcoal filtered water is probably the least expensive way to drink 'safe' water. The carbon filter removes most of the carcinogens and bacteria commonly found in drinking water. These filters are often very inexpensive and can be found in almost any department store. Distilled water has had all the metals (both harmful and helpful) removed. None of the fluorinated and chlorinated hydrocarbons

(coming from combining fertilizers and pesticides with fluoride and chlorine) are removed. It is these hydrocarbons which are linked with the most health problems. Bottled spring waters may be healthy, but they are not yet required to be analyzed for chemical and bacterial levels.

Water can be a miracle cure for many common ailments. Try drinking some now and see if you don't feel better!

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