



Why Hydration is Important, Especially as We Age (NCOA)

Staying hydrated is an essential—and often overlooked—aspect of maintaining good health. As we age, it's even more important. Adults 60 and older are at greater risk for dehydration for a number of reasons, including natural drops in thirst levels and body composition changes. Older adults are also more likely to take diuretics and other medications that cause fluid loss in the body.

If you're struggling to get eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day—the amount recommended by many health experts—here are 10 great reasons to drink more.

1. Improved brain performance

Even mild dehydration—as little as 2% fluid loss—can affect memory, mood, concentration, and reaction time. Adding just a few glasses of water to your daily intake can have a positive effect on cognition, stabilize your emotions, and even combat feelings of anxiety. This is especially important for older adults who are at higher risk for both dehydration and impaired cognitive function.

2. Digestive harmony

Your body needs water in order to digest food properly. Without enough, you may experience irregular bowel movements, gas, bloating, heartburn, and other discomforts that can hurt your quality of life. Upping your fluid intake may help get things moving in the right direction again. It aids in breaking down soluble fiber from your diet to keep your digestion process on track. Mineral water is especially beneficial—look for products enriched with sodium and magnesium.

3. More energy

Dehydration can slow down circulation and affect the flow of oxygen to your brain. A lack of fluids can also cause your heart to work harder to pump oxygen all throughout your body. All of that expended energy can make you feel tired, sluggish, and less focused. Simply by drinking more H₂O, you'll prevent dehydration and have more pep to get you through the day.

4. Weight loss/management

Since it provides a sense of fullness, water can help you feel satisfied in between meals—instead of heading to the snack cupboard. It can also help boost your metabolism. One study of women with excess weight found that drinking additional glasses of water before each meal resulted in substantial reductions in body weight, body mass index, and body composition. According to another 2016 study, adults who upped their water intake by just 1% consumed fewer calories. They also reduced their overall intake of sugar, cholesterol, sodium, and saturated fat.

5. Decreased joint pain

Did you know the cartilage in our joints contains approximately 80% water? Staying hydrated helps your joints stay well-lubricated, which helps reduce friction by creating more of a "cushion" between the bones. Less friction means smoother-moving joints and fewer aches and pains.

6. Better temperature regulation

Research shows that when you're dehydrated, your body stores more heat. This in turn lowers your ability to tolerate hot temperatures. Drinking plenty of water helps you produce sweat when you're overheated during activity, which in turn cools your body down. This built-in cooling mechanism is critical in preventing heat stroke and other potentially deadly heat-related conditions.

7. Kidney stone prevention

Kidney stones are clumps of mineral crystals that form in the urinary tract. If you've ever experienced one, you know how painful they can be. Consuming adequate amounts of water each day can help dilute the concentration of minerals in your urinary tract and make stones less likely. Water also helps flush harmful bacteria from your bladder and can aid in preventing urinary tract infections (UTIs).

8. Healthier heart

Your blood is made up largely of H₂O. When you don't drink enough glasses of water, it becomes concentrated, which can cause an imbalance of vital minerals (electrolytes). These minerals, like potassium and sodium, are key to the proper functioning of your heart.

9. Improved detoxification

Sufficient water intake supports your body's natural detoxification systems, which remove waste and harmful substances through urination, breathing, perspiration, and bowel movements. Supporting your own powerful, built-in detox processes can help enhance your overall health.

10. Fewer headaches

Even a mild fluid loss can cause the brain to contract away from the skull, leading to headaches and migraines in some individuals. Being consistently well-hydrated may help keep head pain in check.

How Much Water Do You Need?

If you want to prevent dehydration, it's as easy as incorporating more water and water-rich foods into your diet. Eight glasses a day is an easy rule to remember and a good general target. You can also use the body weight formula: take one-third of your body's weight and drink that number of ounces in fluids. For example, if you weigh 150 pounds, aim to drink 50 ounces of water each day.

Certain situations will require you to drink more water to maintain good hydration. These include physical activity and exercise, hot and/or humid weather, and occasions when you are vomiting or have diarrhea.

Every person's hydration requirements are different, depending on factors like medical history, health conditions, and any medications being taken. Talk to your doctor to come up with a personalized hydration plan that meets your unique needs.