

## Drink this in: Hydration tips to keep you healthy

By Teddi Nicolaus

**Y**ou brush your teeth. You try to get enough sleep. Maybe you take a walk, eat a few vegetables and remember to wear sunscreen.

But there is another simple habit your body needs every single day, without fail: drinking enough fluids.

Adequate hydration keeps your body healthy. Hydration helps your heart move blood, your brain stay sharp and your kidneys remove waste. It also helps your body control temperature, especially when you're active or the weather is hot.

Many people are not sure how much hydration they need. Experts say the answer is not one-size-fits-all. But staying hydrated doesn't have to be complicated. For most people, water is usually the best choice, but other drinks and even some foods can help. The key is to drink enough, spread fluid intake throughout the day and pay attention to times when your body may need more.

"Hydration is vital to life," says Patrick Burns, MD, an emergency medicine physician and clinical associate professor at Stanford Medicine. "We absolutely need it."

Health experts have moved away from giving everyone the same rigid advice about drinking so many glasses of water a day, Burns says. For most healthy people, the best advice is simple: Drink when you're thirsty.

But that doesn't mean thirst is a perfect guide.

You may need to be more deliberate when you're

sweating, exercising, spending time in extreme heat or losing fluids from vomiting or diarrhea. Some medications can dehydrate you too. In those cases, your body will probably need more to help keep up.

Dehydration can be hard to spot at first. But as it becomes more serious, you may feel low on energy, confused or lightheaded. Your mouth or lips may feel dry. Your heart may beat faster.

Long-lasting or repeated periods of dehydration can lead to kidney stones and urinary tract infections. Dehydration can even strain your heart. Severe dehydration can lead to death.

Your urine can offer a clue about your body's fluid needs. Dark, concentrated urine may be a sign that you need more fluids. Pale yellow urine is generally a good sign.

Urine that is always clear may mean you're drinking more than your body needs. That matters, because drinking too much can also be bad.

Overhydration can dilute sodium in your blood, causing a condition called hyponatremia. It's most common among athletes competing in events like marathons. But the lesson applies more broadly: More is not always better.

Sports and electrolyte drinks can be useful in some situations, Burns says, such as long endurance exercise, extreme heat, heavy sweating or fluid loss from vomiting or diarrhea. But for a typical walk, workout or day at your desk, you don't need them.

Daily consumption of those drinks can be bad for you. Sports drinks can contain a lot of sugar and empty calories, and too many electrolytes can tax your heart and kidneys. They shouldn't replace water as your everyday drink unless your health team has advised it.

"Fluid needs depend on many things, including your size, diet, activity level, climate, hormones and health," says Jennifer Nasser, PhD, RD, a spokesperson for the Obesity Society.

"In a healthy diet containing fruits and vegetables, about 20% of that fluid can come



>> For more tips on hydration, visit [www.nutrition.gov](http://www.nutrition.gov).

from food, so 48 to 80 ounces should be consumed as liquid," Nasser says.

In general, your fluid intake should be spread over 24 hours. Consuming amounts greater than 20 ounces at one time can make you run to the bathroom more, which depletes your body of water.

Thirst can help guide you, but it may fade with age. Humans have body signals that help tell them when they need fluids, Nasser says. But the body's natural "I'm thirsty" reminder weakens as we get older.

That means older adults may miss out on fluids when they need them. Some health conditions can also make hydration harder for seniors to manage.

A simple routine can make hydration easier. Have a drink when you wake up, with meals, before going outside and during and after exercise. Keep a glass or bottle nearby if that helps you remember. Bring a drink when you leave the house.

There's water in foods too, so pack your plate with water-rich melons, oranges, cucumbers, soups and salads. Be extra mindful of hydration when you're sick, traveling or spending time in the heat.

If you don't like plain water, try adding lemon, cucumber, berries or a splash of juice. Ice can also make it more refreshing.

Coffee and tea can count toward hydration. But their caffeine can make you urinate more, losing out on the fluid you're trying to replenish.

In the end, good hydration doesn't have to be fancy. It just has to be steady.

