

Whether you're doing strenuous exercise or you're feeling under the weather, the message you hear is always the same: make sure you drink enough fluids. But how much water should you drink every day? There's no magic number. The amount of water you need depends on factors like your age, gender, health, location and activity level.

Why is water important?

It's important to remember that water makes up over 60 per cent of your body. Your body needs that water to:

- Maintain optimal fluid and electrolyte levels
- Regulate and cool body temperature
- Carry nutrients and help to digest food
- Flushes toxins out of vital organs
- Contract muscles
- Lubricate joints and other body cavities

You lose water through breathing, perspiration, passing urine and bowel movements. To stay healthy, it's important to replenish your supply by consuming beverages and foods that contain water.

Dehydration is dangerous

Not drinking enough water can lead to dehydration. Mild dehydration can reduce your energy levels and make you tired, while severe dehydration means that your body no longer has access to the water it needs to carry out normal bodily functions.

The best way to avoid dehydration is to consume fluid throughout the day, carry a water bottle wherever you go and drink more water to compensate for hot weather and strenuous exercise.

Staying hydrated is easy

The average person consumes 80 per cent of their fluids from beverages like water, milk, juice, soup, sports drinks, soft drinks, coffee and tea. They get the other 20 per cent by eating fruit and vegetables.

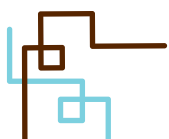
Contrary to common belief, caffeinated beverages like coffees and colas won't dehydrate you – they are stimulants, however, and never recommended as the healthiest choice. Sports drinks are marketed as the ultimate thirst quenchers, but unless you're extremely active you can likely maintain your fluid requirements with regular food and beverages.

Am I drinking enough water?

If you feel good, your urine is clear or light yellow and you aren't experiencing unexplained lethargy or tiredness, you're probably getting enough fluids. If you're thirsty, constipated, irritable or your urine is dark yellow and odorous, you may need to increase your water intake.

The Institute of Medicine recommends the following daily fluid intake for an average day:

AGE	FLUID IN LITRES (OR CUPS – APPROXIMATE)
Child 1 – 8 years	1.3 – 1.7 litres (6 – 8 cups)
Boys, 9 – 18 years	2.4 – 3.3 litres (11 – 15 cups)
Girls, 9 – 18 years	2.1 – 2.3 litres (9 – 10 cups)





AGE	FLUID IN LITRES (OR CUPS – APPROXIMATE)
Adult males	3.7 litres (16 cups)
Adult females	2.7 litres (12 cups)
During pregnancy	3.0 litres (13 cups)
While breast feeding	3.8 litres (17 cups)

Weather, altitude and activity levels may necessitate consuming more water.

Exercise sessions and massage therapy can release toxins (like carbonic and lactic acids) into your blood stream. Drinking plenty of water during and after these activities will flush the toxins from your body.

Is it possible to drink too much water?

Yes! It rarely happens, but if you were to overindulge, your kidneys might become unable to process the extra water. As a result, the electrolyte content of your blood could become diluted and your sodium levels would fall – this is called hyponatremia.

In addition to these effects, excess dehydration can have more serious consequences. For example, severe overheating can put stress on your heart, kidneys and other organs.

Sources:

Institute of Medicine | MassageTherapy.com | Mayo Clinic | Nourish Move Thrive

