

News Column for week of July 10, 2017

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Water is still the best option to stay well-hydrated

Maintaining your body is a lot like running a business. You have certain assets available to keep your body healthy. These assets include nutritious foods, physical activity, and adequate rest. However, the greatest assets you have at your disposal are liquid assets ... plenty of water and nutritious fluids. Your body can't survive for long without fluids. As the outside temperature increases, it is even more important to stay well hydrated.

While there are many options of hydrating beverages, water remains the best option because it's easiest for people to absorb. Cool water absorbs more readily than warm, hot, or ice water. Other replacement fluids can come from foods and beverages with a high water content, such as milk, fruit juice, fruits and vegetables (for example, melons and tomatoes), soups, and broths. These foods offer more nourishment than just replacement of water.

Drinks that do not do the job as well, such as sports drinks, energy drinks, carbonated beverages and fruit drinks, include a large dose of sugar calories. Drinks containing sugar pull body fluids into the stomach and intestine. This takes fluids away from other parts of the body and can cause gastric distress. Additionally, sugary drinks may add significantly to daily calorie consumption and energy drinks frequently contain massive amounts of caffeine. These drinks can cause minor health effects such as a laxative effect, insomnia, and headaches as well as very serious adverse health effects like increased blood pressure, irregular and abnormal heart rhythms, impaired blood flow to the heart, and in extreme cases, sudden death. Careful label reading is encouraged to determine the amounts of caffeine, sugar, and other ingredients included before consuming energy drinks. Energy drinks are NOT recommended for children or teens as they have caused irregular heartbeat and increased blood pressure as well as negative side effects to the nervous and digestive systems as reported by the American Heart Association.

Consuming sports drinks is not necessary for most people participating in physical activities for one hour or less in moderate temperature conditions. Plain water is rapidly absorbed, and it cools the body from the inside out. For people participating in physical activities lasting longer than one hour and/or in extreme temperature conditions, such as a high temperature and /or humidity, consumption of a sports beverage may be appropriate. Sports beverages replace water lost through sweating and also provide a source of carbohydrates to supplement the body's limited glycogen storage.

When a person sweats, small amounts of electrolytes - including sodium, potassium, chloride, and magnesium - are lost along with water. Lost electrolytes can be replaced by eating a diet that meets calorie and nutrient needs. The typical American diet provides enough electrolytes to replace losses from sweat. For extremely demanding physical activities lasting longer than three hours, sports drinks may be advised to replace fluids and electrolytes. Salt tablets are not recommended. Salt tablets may

worsen dehydration, impair performance, increase potassium losses, irritate the stomach, and cause vomiting.

How much fluid you should drink each day is a simple question with no easy answer. Studies have produced varying recommendations over the years. Your need for liquids depends on many factors, including your health, how active you are, and where you live. The Institute of Medicine has determined that an adequate intake for men is roughly 13 cups of fluid a day; for women about 9 cups of fluid a day. For many people, 80 percent of this amount is met by consuming water and other beverages (including caffeinated beverages), while the other 20 percent is derived from foods.

When you exercise or engage in any activity that makes you sweat, you need to drink extra liquid to compensate for fluid loss. An extra 1.5 to 2.5 cups of water should suffice for short bouts of exercise. But intense exercise lasting more than an hour requires more fluid intake.

Often we think about drinking fluids when the weather is hot or when we are exercising. But, cold weather leads to an increased need for fluids as well. Why? When the temperature drops, the body works even harder to maintain a normal temperature. In addition, heated room air can cause skin to lose moisture. No matter what the weather, make sure you consume plenty of fluids.

The simplest way to tell if a person is properly hydrated is to check the color and quantity of urine. If the urine is very dark and scanty, it is concentrated with metabolic wastes. This is a signal that the body needs more fluids. When urine is a clear, light color, the body has a normal water balance. If a person takes vitamin supplements, these may color the urine. In this case, the volume of urine may be a better indicator than color.

Dehydration is a liability you want to avoid. It is essential to good health to consume adequate amounts of fluids daily. For more information about staying hydrated, contact Kathy at kmcewan@ksu.edu or by phone at 620-365-2242.