



News Column for Week of August 20, 2018

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Water and Our Bodies

Think for a moment...what is the most abundant compound in your body? Most of us would probably reply with 'blood' – and we would be half right in saying that. Yes, when we have an open wound, blood is what spills out of our bodies. However, the correct answer to the question is water.

Water is the most important nutrient for our bodies. It makes up 55 to 75 percent of an adult's body weight. For children, that percentage is even greater.

Blood is 83 percent water. The average adult's body contains 10 to 12 gallons of water. The less fat a person has, there will be a higher proportion of water in his/her body. Muscle tissue is about 70 percent water versus body fat that is about 25 percent water. Even bones are 22 percent water.

Most of us are probably aware of the basic functions of water in our bodies: Digestion, transportation of oxygen and nutrients, waste removal, temperature regulation, breathing, and many of our organs depend on water.

Staying hydrated becomes critical in the hot summer months. Our bodies are perspiring more in the process of regulating body temperature through perspiration. Heat leaves our bodies as we sweat, and the water evaporates off the skin. As that process takes place, we need to be sure we are doing a good job in replacing that water loss to avoid dehydration.

As we move through the summer months, our bodies become more accustomed to the warmer temperatures. Because of that, we might be slower to pick up on the subtle signals that our bodies are needing more water, such as fatigue, dry lips, headache, and loss of appetite.

Thirst is the primary symptom and the obvious indication that we are needing water. Unfortunately, the onset of thirst lags behind the body's need for water. We become thirsty when our body has already lost .8 to 2 percent of our body weight.

Children don't tolerate heat as well as adults. Their bodies generate more heat relative to their size. They are not as quick to adjust to changes in temperature, and they have more skin surface relative to their body size. Thus, they lose more water through evaporation from the skin. Kids don't instinctively drink enough fluids, so they need to be reminded to stop and take a drink more often.

Older adults are particularly at risk for dehydration. Their body water decreases with age, creating a smaller margin of safety. The ability to sense thirst declines over the years. Sometimes older adults just forget to drink enough liquids.

Failure to maintain adequate hydration in an older adult can increase risk of urinary tract infections, dizziness, pneumonia, confusion, and disorientation to name a few signs of dehydration. Lack of fluids is one of the most frequent reasons people over 65 years of age go to the hospital.

How do we know if we are getting enough water? The simplest way to tell is to check the color and quantity of urine. If the urine is dark and scanty, that is a signal the body needs more fluids. When urine is clear or light in color, the body has a normal water balance. If a person takes vitamin supplements, color in urine may be affected. In this case, the volume of urine output may be a better indicator than color.

While caffeinated drinks can contribute to your daily fluid requirement, they may create the need to urinate and can cause headache and insomnia in some people.

Water still wins as the best choice for our bodies and to stay hydrated. It is calorie-free, caffeine-free, inexpensive, and readily available.

More information about the importance of water for our bodies is available at K-State Research and Extension Southwind offices, and by contacting Barbara at 620-625-8620 or by email at bstockeb@ksu.edu.