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Healthy Hydration for Outdoor Activity

Water is the most abundant nutrient in our bodies and vital to health. Dehydration occurs when body water levels are below normal. Even a low level of dehydration can sap your energy, and more severe dehydration can be dangerous because it can cause heat illness. Preventing dehydration when working or doing recreational activities outdoors is extremely important, particularly during the hot summer months. Children and people older than 65 years of age are more susceptible to becoming dehydrated. Drinking fluids throughout the day is the best way to prevent dehydration.

What Fluids Are Best to Drink to Stay Hydrated?

Almost any fluid will help keep your body hydrated. However, some fluids are better than others for keeping you hydrated and healthy. Choose water, diluted fruit juices (fruit juice mixed with sparkling or plain water), unsweetened teas and diet sodas more often, and full strength juices, regular sodas, and energy drinks less often. Sports drinks are appropriate if you are doing high intensity physical activity for more than 1 hour. These drinks are specially formulated to help replace fluid and electrolytes lost through sweat. Alcohol is a diuretic and therefore beverages that contain alcohol are not appropriate for healthy fluid replacement.

**Note: If you are taking a multivitamin supplement, it is important to be aware that some vitamins in the supplement change the color of your urine for a few hours, making it bright yellow or discolored. By the end of the day (if you take a supplement in the morning), your urine should be back to a normal color.*

How Much Fluid Should I Drink and How Often Should I Drink Fluids?

Allow thirst to be your guide. Feeling thirsty is a sign of dehydration. However, people can drink enough fluid to satisfy their thirst and still be dehydrated. These are two guidelines for drinking enough fluid to prevent dehydration.

- Start your activity hydrated and keep replacing fluids throughout the time you are outdoors and during your physical activity.
- Take drinks of cool fluids (5-10 oz) every 15 to 20 minutes when doing physical activity or during prolonged times of being outdoors.

How Can I Tell If I Am Drinking Enough?

Fluid needs are based on body weight and physical activity levels. Quick weight loss is due to body water loss. A pound of lost body water weight is equal to about two cups of lost fluid. A good indicator of body hydration is your urine color. An odorless, pale yellow urine color (like the light pale yellow color of lemonade) indicates that you are well hydrated. A darker yellow-orange color* (like the color of apple juice) with an odor indicates you need to drink more fluids.

Signs of dehydration – dry lips and tongue, dizziness, light-headed, infrequent urination, bright or dark-colored urine, small amount of highly concentrated urine, low energy levels.

Signs of heat illness – chills, clammy skin, muscle pains or spasms, and nausea. If you have these signs, move to a cool place, remove excess clothing, and consume cool fluids. If symptoms don't improve, seek medical attention.

Tips to Prevent Dehydration

1. Carry a water bottle and drink from it throughout the day.
2. Start physical activity well hydrated, replace lost fluids during and after the activity.
3. Use a sports drink if you do high intensity physical activity for more than 1 hour or replace lost electrolytes with salty food or snacks and drink plenty of water.
4. Watch for signs of dehydration or heat illness and take necessary steps to prevent worsening of these signs.