

The Importance of Water, Part 1

By Ben Benjamin, PhD

Co-authored by Lois Orth-Zitoli

Most of us are aware of the importance of drinking water. Water is second only to air in importance for life. We can survive many days or even weeks without food, but we can only survive a few days without water. Getting your daily requirement of water helps your organs function, keeps your skin clear and hydrated, and supports the body's digestion, assimilation of nutrients and elimination of toxins. It also makes your body less vulnerable to injury. Unfortunately, the body's need for water and its importance for health are often overlooked. Your water intake is critical to good health. Let's explore the many functions of water in the body and give you supportive information to use and share with your clients.

Did you know that 60% to 75% of your total body weight is water? Most people know that the blood, lymph, urine, sweat and tears are mostly water. However, many of us do not realize that the lungs are 90% water; the brain 76% and even the bones are 25% water. Sixty-seven percent of the water in the body is inside the cell. The other 33% is outside the cells in the extra cellular fluid. This fluid surrounds the cells and is found in the blood, lymph, spinal fluid and joint spaces.



Water has many functions in the body. It is the medium by which nutrients are delivered to tissues and unwanted waste is carried away. It is also the medium in which all chemical reactions take place within the cells, and therefore, greatly influences cell function. Water also serves as a cushion and lubricant for our spine and other joints.

Most individuals lose between 10 and 16 cups of water per day. This loss is in sweat, urine, feces, in the air we exhale, and via direct evaporation from our skin. During exercise in a warm climate, as much as eight cups of water can be lost in one hour. When the heat of summer descends, it's a good time to remind ourselves to increase our water intake to compensate for more water lost through physical activity and time spent in the sun.

The loss of body water through urination is greatly increased by the ingestion of caffeinated and alcoholic beverages. These drinks have a diuretic effect, meaning they stimulate the kidneys to excrete more urine. Not only do we lose more water, we also lose water-soluble vitamins such as vitamin C, vitamin B1 (thiamine) and other B complex vitamins. There is also increased excretion of calcium, magnesium, potassium, sodium, chloride and zinc. (For more information about the negative effects of caffeine please see the side bar.)

Negative Effects of caffeine

A high intake of caffeine has been linked to anxiety, insomnia, elevated blood pressure, heart palpitations, headaches, fibrocystic breast disease, diarrhea, increased stomach acidity and ulcers, birth defects and miscarriages. Long-term use of caffeine will cause overworked and weakened adrenals, which may lead to depression and chronic fatigue.

Tolerance for caffeine varies greatly. Some individuals can tolerate as much as 500 mg of caffeine per day, equivalent to 5+ cups of coffee. Other people cannot tolerate even one cup of green tea, which contains approximately 35 mg of caffeine. This intolerance is often due to decreased capacity of the liver to clear caffeine from the body. If any symptoms of excess caffeine consumption are present or pregnancy is planned, caffeine should be eliminated from the diet. Otherwise, intake of caffeine should be limited to less than 100 mg per day, the equivalent of one cup of coffee, and then only if your body is in excellent health. Besides coffee and tea, caffeine is present in soda, chocolate, aspirin and other drugs such as Fiorinal, Vivarin, NoDoz and Dexatrim.

Water From Other Sources

A diet containing lots of fruits and vegetables will supply about four cups of water per day. Even with a diet high in fruits and vegetables, it is still necessary to drink an additional six to eight cups of water per day to supply enough water to meet the body's daily needs. For every caffeinated or alcoholic beverage you drink, you need to add an additional glass of pure water.

Insufficient water intake results in less than optimal intra-cellular water volume and reduced cell function. This greatly diminishes the body's ability to heal damaged tissues from injury and maintain optimal health. F. Batmanghelidj, MD, the author of *Your Body's Many Cries for Water*, has successfully treated many diagnosed diseases, i.e., peptic ulcers, colitis, hypertension, rheumatoid arthritis, chronic back and neck pain, anxiety, depression, chronic fatigue, high cholesterol, asthma, allergies and diabetes, with just increased and regular intake of water.

According to Dr. Batmanghelidj, dry mouth is the last sign of inadequate cellular water. When the thirst signals produced by the body are ignored or are responded to with intake of beverages other than water such as soda, coffee, tea or concentrated fruit juice, eventually the body stops providing the sensation of thirst. It often requires drinking water regularly throughout the day (even if you are not thirsty) for as long as six to eight months for the normal thirst signals to return and for people to reacquire a taste for water. It can take up to a year or longer to rehydrate your tissues. The sensation of thirst also diminishes as we age. Therefore, it is very important for the elderly to acquire a "habit" of drinking adequate water to avoid cellular dehydration and subsequent health problems.

Author's Note: This article was adapted from an article by Joy Bicknell and Ben Benjamin.

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