



Summer Heat and Fluids – How Much is Enough? How much to drink?

After weeks of waiting and wishing it appears that the full heat of summer is upon us. With the great weather we've been experiencing many are beginning to spend more time outside. This increase in activity, especially as the temperatures rise, makes paying attention to our bodies' fluid needs, or *hydration*, much more important.

Improper hydration can put undue stress on vital organs like the heart and kidneys. This is obviously bad for health, and whether your activity of choice is mowing the lawn or running a marathon your physical performance will suffer.

Dehydration, or not enough fluids, is commonly associated with activity in the heat. Mild cases will cause sleepiness and headaches but severe dehydration can be serious. In the hot summer months dehydration can strike quickly if you're not paying attention.

So we should just drink lots of water, right? Not so fast...while dehydration is more likely to be an issue did you know that you can be overhydrated as well?

Overhydration, known as hyponatremia is a serious fluid imbalance that, at its most extreme, can cause death. It is simply caused by drinking too much fluid (usually water) and is more likely to take place during endurance exercise events (like marathons), where individuals may be consciously trying to 'stay hydrated', unaware that they are drinking too much.

So how do you know how much to drink? This is where things get even trickier. Everyone has different fluid needs, and these needs are highly dependent on factors like temperature, humidity, and activity level. The old 8 x 8oz glasses of water per day advice does not work for everyone. Thirst is one indicator but may not be strong enough to help everyone drink adequately, especially during times of increased need. If you rarely feel thirst and your urine is usually a pale yellow color you are probably on track.

How about all of those fancy sports drinks, are they really necessary? Well, when you sweat you lose electrolytes (mostly salt, but also potassium and a few others) along with the fluid. These electrolytes help you to maintain fluid balance and cannot be replaced by water alone. If you're doing an activity that causes you to sweat heavily then sports drinks may be helpful. They are a very convenient way to replace the carbohydrates and electrolytes that you use/lose during activity.

For the average person, however, sports drinks are probably not necessary. Most of us would do better without the extra calories and sugar in our diet. In addition, there is really no reason that you cannot get the carbohydrates and electrolytes you need from real food. Salted pretzels or popcorn are two great choices, though they may not be quite as appealing if you're out for a 2-hour run!

Whether you are a planning to get some yard work done or training for your next marathon you will quickly experience the benefits of proper hydration. Listen carefully to your body and be aware of your individual fluid needs to maintain hydration during the hot summer months and beyond. *Kentz Willis, M.S., is the University Extension Educator in Nutrition and Food Safety for Northeast Wyoming. He can be reached via email at kwillis3@uwyo.edu or by phone at 674-2980.*