

PENNY SAVER NEWS

FAX: 932-5261

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BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent**HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY**

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776
e-mail:mkeith@ufl.edu**It's Hot, Drink a Lot, Drink Well**

Summer is definitely upon us. There's a hurricane over the horizon somewhere, but right now it's just hot out there. This is the time of year to pay particular attention to how much and what you drink. You've probably heard the 'rule' that we should drink at least 8 cups of water a day. But how strong is that rule?

It turns out - not very! Researchers at Indiana University School of Medicine recently reviewed all the good, medical evidence, and found that - there is no evidence. Yes, we do need liquids, for sure. And the more you sweat the more you need to replace. But there is no solid basis for those 8 cups a day.

For one thing, thirst is your body's first signal that you need to replace some water. Just getting thirsty does not mean you are dehydrated. If you drink when you're thirsty, you'll get enough fluids. Older people and small children tend to not notice thirst as easily, so they might need to be reminded to drink. Most of us will feel it in plenty of time.

Another thing to remember is that most foods provide liquid too. Fruits, vegetables, meats, seafood and some baked goods provide liquid. Of course soup, gelatin, smoothies and frozen fruit snacks are mostly water. And yes, you can 'count' your coffee, tea and soda as part of your fluid intake. The little bit of caffeine in normal amounts of those drinks is not enough to cause excess fluid loss. It is a weak diuretic.

Soda though is part of the most common problem with our liquids. Unless you are drinking strictly diet soda, sugar-free coffee artificially sweetened tea, the extra calories in drinks can be really significant. A 20 oz bottle of regular soda holds 250 calories, a fancy cup of latte coffee can add as much as 500 calories to a day's menu. That will take a lot of exercise to get rid of later, so be careful!

What about the other benefits of lots of liquid? Unfortunately the medical people didn't find much to support them either. Constipation? Unless you have suddenly and significantly increased the amount of fiber in your diet, just drinking extra water will not prevent or treat constipation. And not drinking enough liquid won't cause constipation either.

On the beauty side there are the stories that drinking lots of water will improve your skin tone and carry excess toxins out of your body. Again, the doctors say there is no evidence that extra water will help. Our kidneys normally filter out any toxins in the bloodstream. The kidneys produce and excrete urine normally, every day. Drinking more fluid will make them produce more urine, but there won't be any more toxins in it.

Does water make you less hungry, help you lose weight? Again, there's no evidence that drinking lots of water makes any significant difference. Eating soup or lots of high-water vegetables does help us cut calories, but coffee, tea and water don't.

So, how much should we be drinking, and what? Drink when you're thirsty. If you are doing heavy exercise or sweating a lot, then start a couple of hours before the exercise to drink more. Keep drinking, a little at a time, every 15 - 20 minutes while you're exercising, and keep it up for an hour after you stop.

There are choices about what to drink. Water is the best, no doubt about it.

Unsweetened tea and coffee are okay, up to 5 cups a day. Everyone needs 2 to 3 cups of fat-free milk a day. The minerals and sugars in milk actually help us absorb the water in it very rapidly too. If you still need fluids, go for calorie-free sodas or other drinks, but stick to less than 2 cups (16 oz) a day. Sports drinks are okay for athletes doing endurance exercise or training, but the rest of us don't need the extra minerals or calories they provide. And if you must drink regular sodas, keep it under 8 oz a day.

Here's a delicious smoothie with fluid, fiber, vitamins and minerals. You can make it in a snap to refresh a thirsty throat. If you want a frosty one, keep some bananas in the freezer, ready to grab when needed. If you like a more liquid drink, dilute it with chilled lemon-lime calorie free seltzer or soda water. That adds some bubbles too.

Triple Fruit Shake

3 cups fresh or canned pineapple

1 ½ cups fat free lemon yogurt

1 ripe banana, sliced

1/4 tsp ground cinnamon

Process all in a blend or food processor until smooth. Divide into 3 glasses and serve immediately. Makes 3 8-ounce servings.

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