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a18. Water

Dr. Victor Jean Ouellette June 1999

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Water is an important substance that is not really considered a nutrient. However, without it we die. So water probably should be considered the mother of all nutrients. Water helps the absorption of most nutrients that we take in. Drinking lots of water will help flush toxins from our bodies. But, too much water can lead to Water Toxicity and that can hurt us. Excessive water intake, especially if you have been sweating for a long time, can lead to low Sodium levels in the blood by thinning the blood too quickly as that water is absorbed quickly. This is called hyponatremia and it can be deadly.

So eight glasses a day, and more if you are sweating, is the rule of thumb. Do not include alcohol or teas or coffees in this total because they cause us to urinate more and so we do not end up with the right amount. And, if you are sweating a lot then drinks with extra sodium (salt) would be wise.

Water should be clean. Quite a controversy swirls around distilled water. Although distilled water has no minerals and is not absorbed quickly, it is pure and will help rehydrate the large intestines.

For water to be absorbed quickly research has shown that water needs to contain minerals and sugar. Salts like Sodium and Potassium are the common minerals added to drinks and Glucose and Fructose are the common sugars used. A combination of all of these in a scientifically designed ratio is what is used by athletes to replenish their water losses and is what is used to rehydrate people dehydrated from diarrhea.

The term Isotonic is used to explain a kind of solution of water, minerals and sugars, that will be good for preventing nausea from drinking water too quickly. The isotonic solution will not make the blood go too thick or too thin from drinking water. These solutions do not taste sugary though, and so some people do not like them because of their salty or mineral taste.

Osmosis is a very important process to the cells of our bodies. Osmosis is the movement of water around cells. The water moves in a specific way based on the concentrations of substances on each side of a membrane, a cell wall for instance. The definition of osmosis is complicated so we will not go into it here. But, beverages that do not cause osmosis are tolerated better. These are the isotonic ones.

Elderly people often do not have a good thirst mechanism so should drink lots of water. On hot days you should drink before they become thirsty because if they are exercising then dehydration will precede thirst.

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