When temps are up, drink up: Importance of staying hydrated during the summer

Source: Heather Norman-Burgdolf, extension specialist in food and nutrition

Simply said, a well hydrated body just works better. Adequate hydration aids in digestion, lubricates and cushions joints, protects our organs, helps us maintain body temperature, helps remove bodily wastes and makes it easier for our hearts to pump blood. While it is important to stay hydrated any time of the year, it is extremely important during the summer months when we spend more time outdoors being active. Physical activity or just being outside in the heat can cause us to perspire more, which can increase our risk of becoming dehydrated.

If you are dehydrated, your body cannot cool properly. This can lead to serious problems like heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Some signs that you may be dehydrated include a dry or sticky mouth, low urine output or dark yellow urine, headaches, dizziness, confusion and lightheadedness, especially when quickly getting up.

Scientists agree that drinking water is the best way to stay hydrated. You can also get water from drinks like 100% fruit juices, milk, tea, coffee and water-rich foods like fruit, vegetables, yogurt, soups and broth-based foods. In fact, watermelons, cucumbers, lettuce and tomatoes contain about 95% water.

The amount of water you need to stay hydrated varies by person and depends on your age, gender, physical activity level, overall health and outside temperatures. Some general guidelines on the daily amounts of water needed for adequate hydration are broken down by ages below:

* **1 to 5 years old:** 1 to 5 cups
* **6 to 8 years old**: 7 cups
* **9 to 13 years old:** males need 10 cups and females need 9 cups
* **14 to 18 years old:** males need 14 cups and females need 10 cups
* **18 years and older:** males need 15.5 cups and females need 11.5 cups
  + If you are pregnant, you need 12.5 cups
  + If you are breastfeeding, you need 16 cups

Increase your intake by making water easily accessible for you and your family. Keep it stocked in the refrigerator and on hand when you are outdoors or being physically active. Take water with you in the car. Drink water throughout the day whether you are thirsty. Make it your preferred beverage to have with meals and choose water while eating out. If you don’t like the taste of plain water, you can always use fruits to naturally flavor the water. Lime and lemons are obvious choices. You can also use strawberries, blueberries, oranges, cucumbers or even mint leaves.

Remember, thirst is your body’s way of reminding you to drink water. More information on ways to stay hydrated and other topics related to raising healthy families are available at the (COUNTY NAME) office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

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