

Daily Union Article
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Fresh Refreshments

Although essential to our health and well-being, most people don't drink enough water each day. Water constitutes about 55% to 75% of an adult's body weight and the percentages are even higher in children. The rule of thumb for daily water intake for adults is "8 of 8" – an 8 oz. serving at least 8 times a day. Unfortunately, the average American gets only 3.5 servings a day. This is less than half of what is recommended.

So why don't people drink more water? Reasons may include:

- Sugary drinks, such as soda/pop are preferred
- Dislike the taste of plain water
- Don't care the taste of treated water available through the public tap
- Never developed the habit of drinking water in the first place

Let me offer some counter statements to these reasons for not drinking water.

- 1) Sugary drinks add unnecessary calories to your daily intake and actually have a counter effect in keeping your body hydrated. Even if you choose a diet drink, the additional preservatives and chemicals added to them are causing mounting concern about long-term effects to your body.
- 2) Good water should have relatively no taste at all. What has happened is that our palate has been so saturated with sugars, we have to retrain our tongue to enjoy the simple refreshment we can get from plain water.
- 3) Our tap water is safe to drink. It is rigorously tested to ensure that the water we draw from our tap meets state and federal guidelines for safe consumption. That being said, we do have alternatives for drinking straight out of the tap. With the market saturation for pitcher, faucet connected, and whole house water filtering systems, you can choose the most cost-effective alternative for eliminating the taste of treated water.
- 4) Most water in the United States is consumed between meals. Committing to drinking an 8 oz. glass of water with each meal can nearly double the intake of an average American. If you already drink water for your meals, then perhaps you could drink water between meals to boost your intake.

Dispelling the reasons for not drinking water is not enough to change behavior, though. We have known for years that water is essential to our health and well-being, but we still struggle to increase water consumption. What else can you do?

If you are one of the average Americans who do not consume enough water, you might want to try infused water. This trendy option is both healthy and fun! Sometimes called spa water, infused water consists of water with added fruits, herbs or vegetables or a combination of any of these. It only takes a few minutes to turn a pitcher of plain water into a tasty and often creatively flavored refreshment.

Indeed, you must do a bit of planning to make sure you have what you need for your add-ins and some time for it to chill in the refrigerator before it's served, but it's worth the minimal work!

It's best to start simple. Adding citrus fruits such as lemon, lime, or oranges are a fairly safe starting point. Most combinations are good for up to 3 days if stored in the refrigerator, but some combinations will have a shorter shelf life.

So let's get started. Always wash your hands with soap and warm water before you begin preparation. Wash your produce under cold water to remove dirt or germs on their surface. Use a vegetable brush to scrub fruits and vegetables with hard skin to help get them clean. Never use soap on your produce as remnants of the cleaner will stay in the crevices of the skin and add an undesirable taste to your water! Cut away any bruises or damaged areas of the produce. Be sure to store unused produce in the refrigerator to maintain quality and safety.

Begin with small amounts of ingredients until you get your ideal taste. It is easy to overdo the flavors as some ingredients are more strongly flavored than others. The water can be served with or without ice, but should be served cold. Some fruits, such as blueberries, can be slightly crushed to release their flavors. You may even want to use some frozen fruits to ensure your water stays cold and flavorful. Berries, peaches, and cherries are good options.

Experiment with your favorite flavors. Combining different fruits and vegetables with fresh herbs offers a wide range of flavor possibilities. Here are some suggestions brought to us by the Extension professionals at Penn State:

- Fresh mint, slightly crushed, is a nice addition to most water recipes. Check out the many flavors of mint you try with different fruits.
- Slice a lemon and/or lime or orange into thin slices or wedges and add to the water.
- Strawberries or raspberries may be used, and they may be left whole, sliced or crushed.
- Citrus-Cucumber Water can be made by thinly slicing a large lemon, lime, orange, and cucumber and adding to ½ gallon of water. Refrigerate for at least two hours. Cucumber is a very cool flavor that is especially refreshing in summer weather.
- Watermelon-Basil is a flavorful and surprisingly good flavor combination. Use 2 c. seedless watermelon, cubed or thinly sliced and cut into wedge shapes, and 10-12 basil leaves. Refrigerate for at least two hours before serving.

The point is to improve your water consumption and reduce or eliminate sugary drinks and calories from your daily intake. Making healthy choices can be fun and flavorful! For more information on healthy choices, contact me at the Geary County Extension Office at 785-238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!