

Water and Wellness – A Close Connection

I have a plant that rests on a cabinet in my bathroom that, although it is close to the source, seems to get neglected when it comes to watering. It's amazing how much the droopy plant changes from the time I water it in the morning when I first get up to the end of my morning routine of brushing my teeth. The small amount of time it takes for the plant to revive can be likened to the small amount of time it takes to replenish low stores of water in our own bodies, but we shouldn't wait until we are droopy to consume the water that our body needs for energy and revitalization!

Our body uses water for the following functions:

- ✓ Regulates the temperature in our body
- ✓ Lubricates and cushions our joints
- ✓ Protects our body – specifically the spinal cord and other sensitive tissue
- ✓ Keeps our body regular by ridding it of waste

If you drink water when you are thirsty and when you have meals, you can maintain your healthy water balance. However, when you are exercising, exposed to hot weather, or fighting an illness, you need more water to compensate for the loss of water. In these instances, you should drink *before* you become thirsty to prevent your body from experiencing an imbalance of water or dehydration.

How much water do you need daily? This depends on your age, gender, and health status. As a general rule, men need more water than women and adults need more water than children. Here are a few of the many categories and recommendations represented on USDA's 2010 Dietary Reference Intake tables (which provide recommended nutrient intakes for use in a variety of settings) for healthy and active individuals:

*Children (age 4 – 8) – 1.7 liters per day or 7+ 8 oz. glasses of water

*Women (age 19 and older) – 2.7 liters per day or 11+ 8 oz. glasses of water

*Men (age 19 and older) – 3.7 liters per day or 15+ 8 oz. glasses of water

*Lactating Women (age 14 and older) – 3.8 liters per day or 16+ 8 oz. glasses of water

*This is for the total daily water consumption which would include water from beverages, food, and drinking water.

Although most water needs are met by drinking water or consuming other beverages, many foods that are high in water contribute to your overall consumption each day. Soups and broths may contain as much as 85-95% water. Some fruits and vegetables, such as tomatoes, celery, oranges, and cantaloupe, are also high in water. Making sure that over half of every meal you consume is made up of fruits and vegetables not only keeps your plate healthy, it increases your overall daily water intake.

However, as noted above, you can't rely on the food you consume to meet your daily water needs. The large majority of your water comes from what you drink. Even this can be challenging, though. Not all beverages are created equal when it comes to their contribution to your overall daily water

intake. Calories add up quickly when you consider the caloric value of your beverages. For example, a medium café latte (16 oz.) made with whole milk has about 265 calories in it. A 20-oz. bottle of cola has 227 calories and a sweetened ice tea has an estimated 180 calories. Choose your drink wisely. If you substitute each of these with an equal amount of drinking water, you would reduce your daily caloric intake by 672 calories. However, many of us (including me) drink these beverages because we crave the flavor and/or caffeine they provide. In that case, we should moderate and substitute to reduce the caloric impact of our chosen beverages. Purchase a small latte with low-fat or non-fat milk, choose a diet cola, or add a couple lemon or orange slices to our water to add flavor.

Regardless of how you address your water needs, you must be intentional about consuming adequate amounts of drinking water each day. Here are some more ideas to help you:

Keep your water balance at an adequate level by carrying a water bottle with you at work or home. Keep the water cool to make it more appealing. Add a slice of lemon or lime or powdered sugar free flavoring to jazz up the flavor a bit. Choose water over sugar-sweetened beverages. As added benefits, water has no calories and usually costs nothing when you are dining out.

Over 300 area community members are participating in the Walk Kansas program sponsored by Geary County K-State Research and Extension that continues from now until May 10. This program promotes physical activity, a healthy balance of fruits and vegetables in the diet, and drinking adequate amounts of water daily. They are taking steps to improve their quality of life and promote well-being in the community. I applaud their efforts! If you want more information about your own healthy living choices and challenges, check out our website at <http://www.geary.ksu.edu> or feel free to contact me at the Geary County Extension office (785) 238-4161. Until next time, keep living resourcefully!

(Source: www.cdc.gov)