



HEALTHY HYDRATION HABITS

Water is an essential part of the body making, on average, 60% of the body mass of an adult. We lose water throughout the day and need to regularly top up our levels.

Water is vital for many processes in the body including carrying glucose and other nutrients to cells and excretion of waste. A low water intake is associated with feelings of thirst, dehydration and over the long term can be a cause of a number of health problems.¹

Adult females need 2 litres of fluid per day and adult males 2.5 litres a day, children require a little less depending on their age², requirements vary with weather, activity level, etc. It is important to drink enough water to keep the urine very light coloured throughout the day.³ Approximately 80% of total water intake comes from drinks, and the rest from foods we eat, such as fruits and vegetables which are mostly high in water.

Most of us are not drinking enough, across Europe nearly 50% of adults and 60% of children do not meet the adequate daily fluid intake advised by the European Food Safety Authority.⁴ Equally many choose drinks that are high in calories, sugar or contain unnecessary additives.



CHOOSING WATER TO DRINK – HOW MUCH AND WHAT TYPE?

Recommended total water intake per day	
2-3 years	1 litre
4-8 years	1.6 litres
9-13 years girls	1.9 litres
9-13 years boys	2.1 litres
Over 14 female	2 litres
Over 14 years male	2.5 litres

TYPES OF PLAIN WATER

There is a choice when it comes to water.

- **Tap water**, comes from a mix of underground and surface sources and is chemically treated to ensure it is safe to drink.
- **Natural source waters**, like Natural Mineral Water and Spring Water, come from protected underground sources and have to be safe to drink from the source as they are not allowed to be chemically treated.

HEALTHY HYDRATION HABITS FORMED IN CHILDHOOD

Habits form early in childhood, so encouraging healthy habits in early years is key. An important determinant of a child's liking for a particular food or drink is the extent to which it is familiar, suggesting that those who are offered water to drink regularly will like and choose water to drink.⁵

Research has also suggested that habits formed in childhood persist into later life, although they can always be changed with a bit of effort. Drinking habits are often shaped by parental attitudes and drinking behaviours, so attitudes to drink choice at home can be important.⁶ Children often copy parental behaviour, so encouraging parents to drink water at home can

positively influence their children as it increases the likelihood of their children drinking water.



FORMING HEALTHY HABITS

Researchers have investigated the factors that are associated with healthy drinking habits and the key findings are summarised below:⁸

Increase knowledge of healthy hydration

Few people understood the importance of hydration or had knowledge of why drinking water is good for health. Helping individuals understand the importance of healthy drinking as well as healthy eating is important.

Many drink water in reaction to the feeling of thirst, but often these feelings are easily suppressed or ignored which can cause problems associated with

dehydration. It is important for people to get into the habit of drinking before feeling thirsty.⁷

Participants' references to dehydration and responses to a urine colour chart suggested that many were possibly under hydrated.

HYDRATION TIP:

Refresh your body with water before you feel thirsty.

Establish daily situations where drinking water is the norm

Those who chose water as a drink in a variety of situations were more likely to drink enough water, and to find it easy to do so.

Habits are often associated with specific situations, such as at work, at the gym or out for a walk. To develop habits, researchers advised consistently

drinking water in a situation where it is easy, for example when sitting down at the desk or returning home.

The more often a behaviour is repeated in the same situation, the easier it will become – turning into a habit.

HYDRATION TIP:

Serve water as the cold drink at meal times.

Develop strategies to help increase water intake

Many people lacked insight into strategies to increase water intake, although they spontaneously discussed attempts to drink more, leading to ineffective attempts at behaviour change.

Communicate the benefits people gain from drinking water, perhaps the refreshing taste or immediate health benefits, and encourage these. Healthy hydration can alleviate dehydration symptoms like headaches, fatigue, or irritability. Experiencing these benefits first-hand helps to maintain good water drinking habits.⁸

Ideally water would be an everyday choice of drink when thirsty, and encouraged in other situations. Water should always be available and easily accessible, for example by filling a bottle, pitcher, or glass in advance. Rewards and easy access are two factors are motivators in encouraging the healthy habit of choosing water.⁶

HYDRATION TIP:

Take a bottle of water out and about to sip through the day.



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References

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