



# THE FAMILY PHARMACIST

A QUICK READ FOR YOUR OTC NEED!

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## WATER AS THERAPY: DO YOU DRINK ENOUGH?

One of the most ingenious and versatile substances in the universe, water is important in countless ways for our health and well-being. Water is considered an essential nutrient along with carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, and minerals, and an adequate intake of water can stave off disease and dysfunction.

Water can constitute as much as 65% of adult body weight and is the major vehicle by which all nutrients reach every cell in our bodies. Thanks to water's miraculous ability to dissolve and carry substances, it is the main component in the fluids of all living organisms. Our blood (made up of mostly water) transports many essentials besides red cells, white cells, and immune cells throughout the body. Included are sugars, proteins, mineral salts, breakdown products of metabolism (on their way to be eliminated), hormones, vitamins, blood clotting factors, and countless other essential chemicals for life.

Given its importance for our overall health, making sure that you're getting enough water every day to avoid becoming dehydrated is very important. And just because you're not thirsty doesn't mean you're well-hydrated. Older people or those with certain health conditions may not feel thirst even when they are dehydrated. Dehydration is a common condition that affects people of all ages, but it's particularly common in the elderly. The Council on Scientific Affairs of the American Medical Association reported dehydration in 17% to 28% of older adults

**How much is enough?** This depends on many factors, such as your level of activity, size, environment, and so on. On average, men need about 3.7 quarts a day and women need 2.7 quarts daily. About one fifth of this volume usually comes from our food, including both solid and liquid foods, like soups and juices. So, aside from the intake from our food, this is still about 11 eight ounce glasses of plain water for men and 8 glasses a day for women. Sounds like a lot, doesn't it? However, if you do this you can mitigate or even eliminate a number of common health problems by an adequate daily intake of plain water.

**Diabetes.** Studies have found that plain water intake is associated with a reduction in

diabetes risk scores. Water doesn't *directly* lower your blood sugar, yet water may have a role in reducing high blood sugar and the risk of developing type 2 diabetes. Because the intake of plain water is so important for normal metabolic function and the support of life processes, several studies suggest a 6-7% reduction in the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes when one stays fully hydrated. Some of this benefit may have been achieved by the substitution of plain water for fruit and other sugar sweetened drinks, but plain water also seems to help modify eating patterns and the sense of fullness after meals.

**Constipation.** This is a no-brainer. Clearly, the reason so many people struggle with constipation is due to dehydration. When you don't drink enough water your body will start to conserve fluid in various ways. One of the colon's main functions is to absorb water from food waste sitting in the large intestine. If you're short on water, the body will try to conserve it by pulling water out of the colon. Lack of water in the colon makes stools hard and difficult to pass.

**Stroke Risk.** Dehydration can lead to increased stroke risk, especially in persons over 65. Dehydration can increase blood thickness (viscosity) and raise the risk of blood clots leading to a stroke. Also, if you're dehydrated and have a blood clot that causes a stroke, your outcome is likely to be worse. Dehydration also results in lower blood volume, bringing your blood pressure down and reducing blood flow to the brain. So staying well-hydrated is very important for people with underlying medical conditions, such as atrial fibrillation (A-fib), high blood pressure, or hardening of the arteries.

**Respiratory Infections.** Drinking enough water to stay properly hydrated can help to prevent and manage a respiratory infection. Water helps thin the mucous in your airways so that you can cough it up and either spit it out or swallow it. Thick, sticky mucous left to sit in the airways can be a breeding place for bacteria and viruses. Additionally, the mucous membranes in your throat, nose and bronchial passages need water to stay moist to support immune function, including the movement of white blood cells and the production of antibodies.

An upper respiratory infection can cause a fever as much as 30% of the time. Staying hydrated helps your body regulate temperature and is a non-drug approach to staying

comfortable, managing the fever, and avoiding complications. All in all, staying hydrated during a respiratory infection can lead to a speedy recovery.

**Kidney Disease.** The kidneys are a key organ for water and electrolyte balance. Your kidneys can filter as much as 10 quarts of blood every hour. Most of this volume is water (along with blood cells and proteins) and gets returned to the body by the kidneys. But the bad stuff, like toxins and waste products, get removed from the blood and excreted in the urine. An adequate intake of water provides enough fluid volume to make all this happen efficiently, while minimizing the risk of kidney stones, urinary tract infections, and preventing injury to the kidneys.

**Arthritis.** Inflammation in our joints is a culprit when it comes to arthritis. Dehydration can increase inflammatory markers in the body. Water is a key component of synovial fluid and cartilage, both of which cushion and lubricate our joints. Staying hydrated maintains these materials and reduces joint friction, stiffness and pain.

**Cognition.** There's a lot written about cognition and the benefits of staying hydrated in the medical literature. Even mild dehydration can lead to reduced concentration and alertness. Studies also demonstrate increased fatigue, anxiety, and irritability when we don't consume enough water daily. In the elderly, drinking enough water can improve cognitive stability and slow its decline. Of course, drinking water doesn't have a direct effect on memory or other cognitive abilities, but it does prevent an accelerated decline in cognition due to dehydration.

Staying well-hydrated isn't just a health tip, it's a daily necessity. The simple act of drinking enough water can have profound effects, from supporting joint health and kidney function to improving cognitive performance and managing chronic conditions like arthritis. Hydration needs vary by age, activity, and health status. Remembering to make plain water a regular part of your daily routine is one of the easiest and most effective ways to support your overall well-being.

References on file

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