

Top Tips and Activities! Staying Hydrated



Staying hydrated is extremely important as the body requires water to carry out many vital reactions and in order to transport nutrients around the body in the blood. Throughout the day, the body loses water through daily functions such as sweating, breathing and urination, helping to rid the body of sometimes toxic waste products. To stay hydrated, enough water must be consumed to replace the water lost in these essential reactions.

It is thought that dehydration can have negative effects on both concentration and short term memory and that staying hydrated can help with the management of a number of conditions such as diabetes, kidney stones and urinary tract infections. A recent study has also suggested that drinking plenty of fluids can cut the risk of developing cancer of the bladder as the fluid dilutes any carcinogens.

As the body requires water for essential reactions, if the amount of water consumed is not sufficient, the body uses the available water to carry out these reactions, meaning that water is not available for any non-essential functions. This can lead to the development of dry, wrinkled skin, joint pain and a dry mouth.

As a guideline, the Food Standards Agency recommends that approximately 1.2 litres or around 6 – 8 glasses of fluid should be consumed each day; however this is dependent on the climate, the individual and the amount of activity done. All fluids count towards this daily intake including caffeinated drinks, milk, fruit juice and smoothies. Also, the foods we eat contribute to our daily fluid intake, foods such as fruit and vegetables contain a high percentage of water and even foods such as meat and breads contain between 30 and 50% water.

Current thoughts are that the amount of fluids consumed should be based on feelings of thirst and the colour of urine passed, it should have a pale-straw colour. One of the first signs of dehydration is the sensation of feeling thirsty. Other indications include passing small amounts of concentrated urine, headaches, confusion, tiredness, dizziness, muscle weakness, irritability and a lack of concentration.

Water is seen as the best choice for keeping hydrated during the day. It contains no sugars which damage teeth and contribute to daily calorie intake. If plain water is not liked, add flavour with a slice of lemon, lime or even orange or try sparkling water. Milk is also a good choice as it contains many vitamins and minerals and will not cause tooth decay; however, many flavoured milk drinks or milkshakes do contain added sugar which will contribute to tooth decay. Although fruit juices and smoothies are valuable sources of water, they contain high levels of sugar so are best consumed with a meal. Although sugary, fizzy drinks do contribute to fluid intake, they should be consumed in moderation as they have a damaging effect on teeth and their effect on blood sugar could lead to dips in concentration during the day.

Experts advise starting the day with a drink to help replace any fluid lost during the night, in addition to having a drink before bedtime. To reduce the chance of dehydration during the day, it is recommended that children have both a drink with their lunch and carry a bottle of water to sip, many schools also provide free drinking water to their pupils. Remember that foods eaten throughout the day can contribute to fluid intake, fruit and vegetables such as grapefruit, watermelon, celery and cucumber contain a particularly high percentage of water.