



Water Intake for Children Fact Sheet

Why we need water

The human body is about 60% water. It is necessary for our health and well-being. Water is part of our cells, blood, digestion, and waste elimination. Water also lubricates joints. We cannot live more than a few days without water.

Too little water can lead to dehydration and the following symptoms:

- Fatigue
- Headache
- Dry mouth
- Muscle weakness
- Dizziness
- Lightheadedness

How much water do we need?

The amount of water we need depends on our body size, physical activity, the weather, and caffeine consumption. Most men and women need about 8-12 cups of water per day. Children need less because they are smaller.

About 70-80% of people's total water intake comes from drinking water and other beverages; the rest people get from food. The table below shows the recommended amount of beverages that children and youth should drink on a daily basis.

Age Range	Adequate Daily Intake of Beverages
1 - 3 years	about 4 cups
4 - 8 years	about 5 cups
9-13 years	about 8 cups for boys about 7 cups for girls
14-18 years	about 11 cups for boys about 8 cups for girls

Sugar-sweetened beverages and juices

Children who drink just a couple servings of sugar-sweetened drinks each day have a higher risk of being overweight. These children also tend to eat a less healthy diet that is low in important nutrients. For instance, they may drink less milk, missing out on the calcium needed for healthy bone growth. Since children are growing, this lack of nutrients impacts their health for life. This includes not only soda pop, but also juice drinks that are less than 100% juice.

While fruit juice contains a high dose of important vitamins and minerals, it also has a lot of sugar. This means that drinking juice instead of eating fruit causes a child to consume more calories and feel less satisfied. In addition, some juices are very acidic, and they, along with soda pop, can damage teeth.

The role of caffeine

Caffeine stimulates children in much the same way as adults. Too much caffeine can change children's behavior by causing nervousness, upset stomach, headaches, difficulty concentrating or sleeping, and increased heart rate and blood pressure.

In addition, caffeine makes the body lose water, which may lead to dehydration. Caffeinated drinks are particularly bad in hot weather, when children need to replace more water due to sweating. Therefore, children should avoid even diet soda pop with caffeine.

Moving to water (and other non-sugary drinks)

One reason soda pop and juice drinks are popular is because they are sweet and have flavor. That can make the switch to water less attractive. Ways to increase the amount of water your child drinks include:

- Only have water and other non-sweetened beverages available
- Keep water chilled
- Add a squeeze of lemon or lime juice
- Move gradually from juice to water by mixing the juice with water. Use more water each time you make a mix
- Use sugar-free drink mixes, and try to avoid iced teas with caffeine

Bottled water vs. tap water

Many people worry about the quality of tap water and choose to drink bottled water instead. In the United States, however, there is no evidence that bottled water is safer or healthier than tap water. In addition, tap water is required to meet stringent federal guidelines. Bottled water does not have to meet these same standards. In fact, some bottled waters actually are tap water.

References:

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