

Dehydration in Cold Weather, by KI5MA

As temperatures drop it can become harder to keep hydration up. It's not uncommon to feel less thirsty in cold weather and many people are unaware that cold-weather dehydration exists. Dehydration occurs when the body doesn't have enough fluid to function properly. Regardless of the temps outside, staying hydrated is important all year round.

Every time you sweat, urinate, or have a bowel movement, water is lost. It may be difficult to notice when you're sweating in colder weather, so pay attention when you're bundled up. Even when you're not sweating, you lose water through the skin, and the drier air from indoor heating can cause you to become dehydrated without even noticing. A lack of water not only results in dehydration but can increase your risk of kidney stones, urinary tract infections, and constipation.

Water makes up approximately 60-70% of our bodies and is essential to how well our bodily systems are regulating everyday functions. Water is necessary for transporting nutrients, removing waste from the body, supporting the immune system, hydrating your tissues and organs, maintaining blood pressure as well as maintaining a proper body temperature. This is important for preventing hypothermia if outdoors in winter.

Signs of dehydration

Besides the obvious sign of feeling thirsty, there are other indicators that you're not getting enough fluids. The easiest to monitor is the color of your urine, which should be a pale yellow or clear color. If it's darker, it's time to drink! Other signs of dehydration include constipation, dry mouth or chapped lips and skin, headaches, difficulty concentrating, irritability, feeling faint or dizzy and a rapid heart rate. Infants and elderly are at the highest risk for dehydration. You should seek immediate medical attention if you're experiencing decreased urine output, fever between 101-103 F, or diarrhea for more than 2 days as these are signs of more serious dehydration.

How much water do I need?

The recommended amount of water varies from person to person and depends on factors such as age, sex, activity level, altitude, weather, and overall health. Certain health conditions require more or less fluid intake based on the individual's needs. A simple method to determine the minimum ounces of fluid you may need each day is to take your weight in pounds and divide it in half. For example, if you weigh 160 lb, you will require at least 80 fluid ounces per day. Most people can stay hydrated properly with adequate daily water intake, but if you're sweating heavily, exercising for more than 60 minutes, or have significant fluid losses from fever, a sports drink or electrolyte replenishment packet may be appropriate.

Tips for Staying Hydrated in Winter:

1. Drink warm fluids if you find it difficult to drink cold water when it's cold outside. Sipping on warm water, hot herbal teas, or warming broths can count towards your hydration.
2. Add flavor such as a wedge of lemon, lime or other pieces of fruit to plain water. You can also utilize unsweetened water enhancers to add an infusion of flavor.

3. Carry a water bottle with you everywhere you go to encourage hydration throughout the day. If you're working from home, have a designated water vessel at your desk and refill as necessary.
4. Drink your food. Homemade soups in winter can increase fluid intake to help you meet your fluid needs, as well as including water-rich fruits and vegetables such as green leafy vegetables, citrus fruits, melon, tomatoes and cucumbers.
5. Avoid too much caffeine which can contribute to dehydration. Caffeine is a natural diuretic, which means it can flush water and electrolytes from your body. For every caffeinated beverage you consume, such as your mug of coffee, have an additional glass of water of equal volume.
6. Swap your alcohol for a mocktail. Alcohol should not be counted towards fluid intake and can interfere with a person's perception of cold, increasing the risk for hypothermia. Instead, try mixing unsweetened seltzer water with a slice of citrus or mixed berries.
7. Make hydration a routine with the goal of drinking a certain amount of water each day. Start by incorporating a glass of water on your bedside table to be consumed first thing in the morning and aim to make it your drink of choice throughout the day.

With these tips in mind and simply remembering to drink more water can help you stay hydrated and healthy throughout the winter months.