



Summer Heat and Fluids – How Much is Enough?

Kentz Willis, M.S.

*University of Wyoming Extension Educator
Nutrition and Food Safety for Northeast Wyoming*

After weeks of waiting and wishing, it appears that the full heat of summer is upon us. With the great weather we've been experiencing, many are spending more time outside. This increase in activity, along with the temperature rise, makes paying attention to our bodies' fluid needs, or *hydration*, much more important.

Improper hydration can put undue stress on vital organs like the heart and kidneys. This is obviously bad for health, and whether your activity of choice is mowing the lawn or running a marathon, your physical performance will suffer.



Dehydration, or not enough fluids, is commonly associated with activity in warm weather. Mild cases cause sleepiness and headaches but severe dehydration can be serious. In the hot summer months, dehydration can strike quickly if you're not paying attention.

So we should just drink lots of water, right? Not so fast...while dehydration is more likely to be an issue, you can be overhydrated as well?

Overhydration, known as hyponatremia, is a serious fluid imbalance that, at its most extreme, can cause death. It is simply caused by drinking too much fluid (usually water) and is more likely to take place during endurance exercise events (like marathons), where individuals may be consciously trying to 'stay hydrated', unaware that they are drinking too much.



So how do you know how much to drink? This is where things get even trickier. Everyone has different fluid needs, and these needs are highly dependent on factors like temperature, humidity, and activity level. The old eight 8-ounce glasses of water per day advice does not work for everyone. Thirst is one indicator but may not be strong enough to help everyone drink adequately, especially during times of increased need. If you rarely feel thirsty and your urine is usually a pale yellow color you are probably on track.

What about all of those fancy sport drinks, are they really necessary? When you sweat you lose electrolytes (mostly salt, but also potassium and a few others) along with the fluid. These electrolytes help maintain fluid balance and cannot be replaced by water alone. If you're doing an activity that causes you to sweat heavily, sports drinks may be helpful. Sport drinks are a convenient way to replace the carbohydrates and electrolytes that you use/lose during activity.

For the average person, however, sport drinks are probably not necessary. Most of us would do better without the extra calories and sugar in our diet. In addition, there is really no reason that you cannot get the carbohydrates and electrolytes you need from real food. Salted pretzels or popcorn are two great choices, though they may not be quite as appealing if you're out for a two-hour run!

Whether you are planning to get some yard work done or training for your next marathon you will quickly experience the benefits of proper hydration. Listen carefully to your body and be aware of your individual fluid needs to maintain hydration during the hot summer months and beyond.



Fruit has a high water content and this fresh fruit salad is a great way to help you get the fluids you need along with all the vitamins, minerals, and fiber that fresh fruit has to offer!

Tangy Fruit Salad

Serves 8

1 pineapple, peeled and cut into chunks
2 oranges, peeled, sectioned, and cut into chunks
2 kiwi fruit, peeled, halved, and sliced
2 cups seedless grapes, halved
2 cups strawberries, sliced

½ cup fresh pineapple juice (could substitute orange juice)
¼ cup fresh lime juice
2 Tbsp. honey
½ tsp. lime zest
2 tsp. poppy seeds

Wash and cut the fresh fruit as directed and mix in a large bowl (Reserve ½ cup of pineapple chunks if making fresh juice.). To make fresh pineapple juice, simply blend ½ cup of the pineapple chunks with about 1 Tbsp. of water (Strain, if you wish.). Mix the pineapple juice with the lime juice, honey, lime zest, and poppy seeds and pour over the fruit. Keep refrigerated until serving.

For more information on “Living Well in Wyoming” *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, contact your University of Wyoming Extension Nutrition and Food Safety Educator!



August, 2011