

best **body**

Eau, Yeah! **Hydrate for Your Health**

Most people sip H₂O when they're parched, but proper water consumption goes well beyond quenching thirst—it's critical for your total well-being.

By Laura Beil and Yi-Hwa Hanna

Here's something to think about: More than half of your body is made up of water. Not fat, not muscle—H₂O.

So if you weigh, say, 68 kilos, about 41 of them come from the liquid stuff. In fact, every one of your cells is essentially a soggy bag of fluid, surrounded by more fluid. Without it, your cells—and you—would die. That's why people can survive a long while without food but not without water, the single most vital substance for sustaining life.



Healthy Dose

If this all seems dramatic, consider that ample water is key for keeping your digestion on track, your nasal passages moist, and your kidneys content. And for enhancing pretty much all of your major organs, including the brain.

The Delivery System

You might now be picturing your insides as a bunch of parts just sloshing around in water. A more accurate picture involves some complex biology: Every time you take a sip of H₂O, it seeps through your intestines into your blood vessels and, like a bucket of water dumped into the ocean, becomes part of a larger mix of liquid and minerals—most notably, salt. This saline-type solution shuttles chemical signals back and forth between cell membranes, informing your every action. It also ferries around your body's other must-haves (oxygen, glucose, hormones) via the blood, which is mostly made up of—you guessed it—water.

How and when water exits your body depends on myriad factors, including humidity and temperature, your activity level, and how much you sweat, says Lawrence Armstrong, Ph.D., a researcher in the Human Performance Laboratory at the University of Connecticut. What *is* clear is that if too much exits and not enough enters, your well-being can start to suffer.

Parched Health

Given the above, it may seem you have plenty of water to spare. But losing even a tiny amount can set off an alarm. Thirst—a dehydration warning sign, assuming you haven't just had a salty snack—typically kicks in when you've lost a measly 2 percent of your water weight. At that point, you could become prone to muscle cramps and headaches. Your athletic abilities might start to falter. The resulting stress speeds up your heartbeat and can leave you feeling

fatigued, says Lawrence L. Spriet, Ph.D., chair of human health and nutritional sciences at the University of Guelph in Ontario.

In short, everything begins to feel like a slog. And if you rarely remember to sip water, beware: Long-term low liquid intake has been linked to problems such as kidney stones and urinary-tract infections, as well as prolonged labour if you're pregnant.

An H₂O deficiency can also affect the brain in surprising ways. Research suggests that mild dehydration—which may not even make you thirsty—can interfere with your ability to concentrate and can ramp up stress and anxiety. Scientists are still figuring out the particulars, but they suspect a lack of water adversely affects the nerve cells that control mood.

Of course, being *really* dehydrated is very serious. If you lose 5 to 6 percent of your water weight at one time, you could suffer symptoms such as mental confusion or vomiting, says Stella L. Volpe, Ph.D., R.D., professor and chair of the nutrition sciences department at Drexel University. (This type of severe dehydration, which usually affects only athletes and those in extreme climates, should

be considered an ER-worthy medical emergency.)

Smart Sipping

The tricky thing is, there are few set-in-stone guzzling guidelines. Turns out, the oft-heard “eight glasses a day” may be a health myth that won't work for every person; it all depends on individual biology and lifestyle.

In general, the Institute of Medicine recommends that the average woman get at least 11.4 cups of water a day, though that includes fluid you get from food (even cooked chicken, for example, is filled with water, making it likely you'll eat around 20 percent of your daily H₂O intake).

The American College of Sports Medicine recommends pre-hydrating, or drinking about 0.5 litres of water four hours before you exercise. Better yet, stay hydrated by sipping slowly and regularly. Slurping down huge amounts right before the gym—or, say, getting on a long flight—mostly just means extra trips to the bathroom, says Hannah Davis, a certified personal trainer and cofounder of Gotham Versatile Training in New York City.

When in doubt, stop and ask yourself, *What activity am I doing, for how long, and in what temperature?* If you're

exercising for less than an hour in cool weather, you probably don't need to drink water throughout your workout.

If you're getting in a fierce sweat session—say, a tennis tournament or longer run—pause for fluid breaks. If you're at the office and just wondering about the sogginess of your cells, take a peek at your urine, says Volpe. If it's pale yellow, you're fine. Any darker means you need more water; consistently crystal-clear urine means you're trying too hard to hydrate. Above all, listen to what your body asks for. So what do we do during Ramadan, where those of us

who are fasting will have to go for about 15 hours without food or drink, and those of us who aren't must abstain from eating or drinking in public? Firstly, avoid being out in the hot sun as much as possible. Then, make sure you're getting your H₂O in during non-fasting hours: “Fasting from sunrise to sunset is a long period [to go] without fluids. Although no lasting harm appears from it, it's recommended to drink lots of fluids during non-fasting hours to meet your fluid intake requirement and prevent dehydration,” says Leila Smaily MA, RD, BSc., Clinical Dietitian at City Centre Clinic. And keep in mind that this doesn't need to just be through drinks: “You don't need to chug down 13 cups of beverages a day though. Soups, stews and water-packed produce, such as tomatoes, cucumbers, lettuce, oranges and watermelon hydrate your body too,” Leila says.

An article in the *British Medical Journal* suggests that while the sports-drink industry has raised loud alarms over dehydration, people should simply respond to their own symptoms. Therein lies the only hard rule of hydration: If you're thirsty, drink (when you're not fasting, of course!). And if you've gone a few hours without sipping, take down a glass of water.



Coconut Water: Hydration or Hype?

Proffering countless benefits such as high levels of electrolytes and a low fat content, coconut water seems to be a great alternative to regular water—after all, it can keep you super hydrated (which, as you know, is great for your body, your skin and your overall health), replenish your energy after exercise and deliver nutrients the way many other drink options can't match up to, right?

According to global market research experts Mintel, the number of new product introductions for coconut water increased by a jaw-dropping 540 percent (yes, you read that right—it's quintupled) between 2008 and 2012. The huge appeal of coconut water is in large part due to the numerous health benefits associated with it, but the trend factor also can't be ignored: With countless celebrity endorsements for the use of coconuts in every which way—from the water to coconut oils—and the global health and wellness industry predicted to hit a record high value of US \$1 trillion by 2017—it's little wonder that à la mode coconut water is now a

billion dollar market in the US and the UK alone.

While nature's sports drink does have its fair share of benefits, experts insist that there is a time and a place where it's the right substitute for regular, good old H₂O and that it's important to separate the facts from the hype. For starters, coconut water is only obtained from young, green coconuts, and is a completely different product from coconut milk (which is a liquid squeezed from the inside pulp of a coconut). It is appealingly low in calories and fat content in its most natural form—but much like you would with juices or any other packaged version of a healthy produce-based item, if you're drinking coconut water, it's important to seek out one that has as little sugar, or other additives or preservatives included to reap its full rewards.

Also cholesterol-free, natural coconut water is packed with potassium, magnesium and phosphorus, and it's also low in sodium. It's this high electrolyte content that makes it such a popular post-workout drink, with a study published in the journal



of the International Society of Sports Nutrition finding that it's actually just as effective at rehydrating the body after a tough workout as a sports drink. Yet the low sodium count means that, if you're sweating very heavily after an exceptionally strenuous workout, you might be better off sticking with a regular sports drink to help boost your sodium levels, say researchers at Indiana University Southeast in New Albany, Indiana. Otherwise, for regular workouts—including those that are demanding enough to be challenging—researchers from Kaplan University School of Health Sciences claim that coconut water could make a great alternative, since its total electrolyte count is more than double that of traditional sports drinks—and with half

the carbohydrates to boot.

So should we be reaching for coconut water instead of our regular H₂O when we're not working out? That depends on what you're looking for—some commercial brands of coconut water sneak in high levels of sugar and additives, so if you're just after some basic hydration you might be better off sticking with plain old water. But if your tastebuds can't take another sip of mineral water and you're seeking a refreshing, low-calorie and low-carbohydrate drink with a bit more flavour, that gives you something a little more in terms of any nutrients—the high potassium content means it's a perfect intensive hydration boost after a hard night out or when you have muscle cramps, for instance—coconut water is an undeniably great choice. ■

IN THE TROPICS

While fresh coconut water straight from the fruit itself is our favourite option when we can get it—we love the one they serve at Baker & Spice Dubai (Dhs22 per glass)—getting our hands on it isn't always an easy feat. When you're in need of a pre-packaged fix, here are six popular go-tos:

1. JAX COCO

With absolutely no added sugar, preservatives or colourings, we love this 100% pure, micro-filtered coconut water with a delightful taste (and aftertaste)—and we also love its super stylish, modern packaging.

2. ZICO

Gluten-free, lactose-free and dairy-free, this premium, market-leading brand is made up of 100% coconut water. It contains zero added sugar, and fresh Thai coconuts are used in the fat-free blend for a better flavour.

3. FOCO

Made exclusively from single-sourced young green coconuts, this all-natural

100% pure coconut water has no sugar or preservatives added, is fat- and cholesterol-free and we love that it doesn't taste overly sweet.

4. O.N.E.

The third-largest coconut water brand in the US, this gently pasteurised fat- and cholesterol-free option's slightly sweeter taste makes it a great base for smoothies and protein shakes.

5. COCO SAMBA

Created exclusively with young coconuts at the Coco do Vale plantation in Brazil, this coconut water is packed at the source, has no added sugar (or fat, for that matter) and also contains Vitamin C for an extra boost.

6. COCO FACE

Exclusively available at Blue Marlin Ibiza in the Middle East (for now, anyway), this brand delivers it totally fresh, raw and unpasteurised, in the coconuts themselves. Sourced directly

from Thailand to ensure that they taste delicious, the coconuts are completely untampered with, save for a quick shave and dress-up, meaning they're coming straight from the tree to you in an adorably happy-looking package.

