



Fluids and health

What's all the fuss about fluid?

Fluid is essential for life and for keeping us healthy. Fluid has many roles in the body, including carrying nutrients to our cells, assisting chemical reactions and maintaining body temperature. It is used to help our organs function well, aids digestion and helps remove waste from our body.

Fluid is lost each day through normal daily activities such as breathing, going to the toilet and sweating. If it is not replaced, we become dehydrated. Getting enough fluid is important when recovering from an eating disorder, as even mild dehydration can make you feel tired and drain your energy.

An imbalance of fluids can result from drinking too little, drinking too much or from certain medical conditions. Fluid imbalance can result in:

- increased heart rate
- decreased body temperature
- dizziness
- seizures
- urinary tract infections
- dry, wrinkled skin and pimples
- tiredness
- constipation
- short term weight changes
- bad breath
- swelling (particularly of the ankles and hands)
- dehydration

Drinking too much fluid can be as dangerous as drinking too little. Excess fluid dilutes important substances in the blood and can result in seizures and other serious physical complications (especially in people with a low body weight).

What are fluids and how much do we need?

Fluids are liquids and drinks such as water, milk, juice, herbal tea, cordial, and soft drinks. These provide fluid to our bodies to help replace what we lose on a daily basis. Foods such as soups, jellies, yoghurt and ice cream also provide some fluid.

To maintain a healthy fluid balance, most adults need around 2000-2500mls of fluid per day (higher for men than women). This means 8-10 (250mls) cups each day. You might use this amount as a guide while learning to listen and respond to your body's cues, keeping in mind that a range of factors influence our thirst.

Did you know?

Fluid recommendations may vary for those recovering from eating disorders. As our bodies are made up of around 60% water, the Australian Dietary Guidelines recommends that for the general population, the majority of our fluid comes from drinking water. If you are recovering from an eating disorder, and especially if you are underweight, recommendations of water intake may vary from what is recommended for those who do not have eating disorders. Including a range of other fluids such as juice, milk drinks

and cordials may help to meet your nutrient needs and assist in regaining weight to a healthier place.

Managing fluid intake in recovery

As you work towards recovering from your eating disorder, you might like to ask yourself whether the following factors influence your fluid intake. Being aware of why we do things can often be the first step in helping you make different choices.

Factors affecting fluid intake:

- Refusing fluids or limiting the amount you drink
- Not feeling thirsty
- The weather: When it is cold it may be harder to drink. When it is hot, we usually need to drink more to replace the fluid lost as sweat in the heat
- If you have a temperature (fever) or are exercising, you lose fluid and may need more than you feel thirsty for
- Being busy means that you might forget to drink
- Drinking more to avoid getting hungry
- Drinking more, or less, to influence the number on the scales

If you are drinking too little:

- Try to have one or two drinks with every meal
- Have a drink at morning and afternoon tea
- Have a fluid plan and/or set an alarm
- Having a water bottle on hand may encourage drinking and assist in keeping track of fluid intake

- Try sticking reminder notes by your desk, living area or where you spend lots of your time as a prompt
- Varying the type of fluid you are having may also help

If you are drinking too much:

- Try to limit drinking to meals and mid-meals
- Explore why you are drinking too much and what function this is serving. You may like to speak with your Accredited Practising Dietitian to help you do this

What about caffeine?

Drinks like coffee, strong tea and some “energy” drinks contain caffeine. Caffeine is a stimulant, and having too much has been linked to disturbed sleep, anxiety, irritability, increased stress levels, depression, stomach upsets, calcium loss, headaches and nausea. These effects might get in the way of recovering from an eating disorder. For those that enjoy these drinks, current recommendations are to have no more than 400mg caffeine per day, which is the equivalent of 3-4 cups of instant coffee or strong tea per day.

A final thought...

Getting the balance and types of fluids that best meet your individual needs will enable your body to function well and help you on your journey towards recovery.

Further reference:

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/water-a-vital-nutrient