

Weekly Column – Donna Krug, District Director and Family & Consumer Science Agent – Cottonwood Extension District.

Beat the Heat with Plenty of Fluids

We made it through the Barton County Fair with just a couple of hot days. Some of the surrounding counties have not been that lucky. The Ellis County Fair, which started when ours came to an end had several 100 plus degree days in a row. Since we know it will be well over a month before we can expect temperatures to cool down it is the perfect time to remind everyone about the importance of staying hydrated. Drinking eight cups of fluid a day is recommended under normal circumstances to replenish essential body fluids, and more is needed as summer temperatures and humidity rise.

We sometimes forget that 55 – 75 percent of the body's weight is water; the brain is 70 percent water; blood is 82 percent water, and the lungs are nearly 90 percent water. Water is also responsible for carrying nutrients and oxygen to cells; cushions organs, tissue, bones and joints; removes waste; and regulates body temperature.

In high heat, humidity, and times of high activity, such as working outdoors or participating in athletic activities, water is lost through perspiration, which helps cool the body through the evaporation of fluids on the skin. Exposure to the sun or a sunburn will speed fluid loss, and so will drinking beverages containing caffeine or alcohol, which both act as diuretics. Fluid replacement is essential, but it is best to not wait until you are thirsty. Excessive water loss or dehydration can impair body function and lead to heat exhaustion and/or heat stroke that can be life threatening.

Water is recommended for the majority of the fluid replacement because it is readily absorbed; cool water is preferred because it is absorbed more readily than hot or ice water. Foods that have a high water content include melons and other fruits, tomatoes and other vegetables, soups smoothies, puddings, and gelatin salads. Sports beverages may be helpful for

athletes who are exercising more than one hour and are in need of electrolytes and quick energy, but consider diluting them with water in order to reduce calories.

The bottom line on staying hydrated is to drink fluids before you become thirsty. As we age our ability to sense thirst declines, leaving older people unable to rely on their thirst to prompt them to drink enough fluids. Infants and small children also need to be monitored closely to assure that dehydration does not occur. Little ones lose more fluids because they have a greater proportion of skin surface in relation to their size. Offer water frequently, each time a child passes through the kitchen and before, during and after play.

In addition to replacing fluids it is recommended to wear a hat with a brim and sunglasses; choosing loose, comfortable clothes that breathe; use sunscreen; and take regular breaks to help minimize the effects of heat and humidity.

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