

Fluids Important to Manage Heat, Humidity Safely

I guess you could say “The Heat is on!” But after all it is July and County Fairs are in full swing, so what else could we expect? As we look ahead to a forecast of triple digit heat it seems like the perfect time to remind everyone about the importance of staying hydrated. A good rule of thumb for the amount of water you need is to divide your body weight by two. The resulting number is the number of ounces of water you should be drinking under normal circumstances and more is needed as summer temperatures and humidity rise. So for an example, a 150-pound individual should have at least 75 ounces, but more during this heat wave. Sometimes we forget that 55-75 percent of our 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.

Exposure to the sun or getting sunburned 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 or heat stroke and can be life threatening. It is a good idea to become familiar with the signs of heat exhaustion. They include: dizziness, weakness, feeling thirsty, uncoordinated or nauseated. Most people sweat a lot during heat exhaustion. The signs of a heat stroke are different. They include: a body temperature of 104 or above, confusion, staggering, possible fainting, either a rapid pulse or a slow weak pulse, and not sweating, despite the heat. It is important to get medical help right away if you suspect a heat stroke.

Cool water is recommended for the majority of fluid replacement because it is easily absorbed. Many foods also have a high water content and should be included in a healthy summer diet. Melons and most other fruits, along with tomatoes, vegetables, soups, smoothies, puddings and gelatin salads should not be overlooked. 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 sugar consumption.

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.

Let’s hope that the heat breaks soon before the 2020 summer goes into the record books!

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