Are You Getting Enough Dihydrogen Monoxide in Your Diet?

Have you heard of dihydrogen monoxide, a miracle elixir that can lengthen your life and bestow many other health benefits? Are you including enough in your daily diet?

Dihydrogen monoxide – otherwise known as H₂O, or water – is vital to life. All joking aside, it keeps every system in our bodies functioning properly. It helps keep our body temperature stable, lubricates and cushions our joints and sensitive tissues, moves nutrients around our body, and helps our body get rid of waste.

Our bodies are made up of about 60 percent water. It’s in every cell, tissue, and organ. That's why getting enough water every day is so important for health.

Usually, we can meet our daily need for water by drinking it with meals and whenever we feel thirsty. But if you're going to be outside in hot weather for most of the day or doing vigorous physical activity, you'll need to drink more. Sweating causes us to lose body fluids, and these need to be replaced.

How Much Is Enough?

Generally, most people need about 4-6 cups of water a day, according to the Harvard Medical School. If you're outside on a hot day, a general rule of thumb for healthy people is to drink 2-4 cups of water per hour – more if you're sweating heavily. Your medical provider can advise you if you have questions about what’s right for you.

If you think you're not getting enough water, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have some tips that may help:

- Carry a water bottle when you’re at work or running errands.
- Freeze some freezer-safe water bottles. Take one with you for ice-cold water all day long.
- Choose water instead of sugar-sweetened beverages, like soda and fruit drinks. This can also help you manage your weight. By substituting water for one 20-ounce, sugar-sweetened soda, you save about 240 calories.
- Choose water instead of other beverages when eating out. Generally, you’ll save money and reduce calories.
- Give your water a little pizzazz by adding a wedge of lime or lemon. This may improve the taste and encourage you to drink more than you usually do.
Dehydration

If we don’t get enough water in our diet, we can become dehydrated. This can cause the body to overheat. It also can cause unclear thinking, mood changes, constipation, and kidney stones. If untreated, dehydration can lead to seizures, brain damage, and even death.

Dehydration can be mild, moderate, or severe, based on how much of your body's fluid is lost and not replaced. Severe dehydration is a life-threatening emergency. So it's important to pay attention to your body and watch for signs of dehydration before it becomes severe.

Signs of mild to moderate dehydration include:

- Thirst
- Dry or sticky mouth
- Not urinating much
- Dark yellow urine
- Dry, cool skin
- Headache
- Muscle cramps

If you notice these signs of dehydration and treat it quickly, you should recover completely. If you don't, dehydration can become severe. Then symptoms can include:

- Dry, shriveled skin
- Irritability or confusion
- Dizziness or light-headedness
- Rapid heartbeat
- Rapid breathing
- Sunken eyes
- Listlessness
- Shock (not enough blood flow through the body)
- Unconsciousness or delirium

Prevention and Treatment

To prevent dehydration, simply drink plenty of fluids every day. It's best to drink water regularly throughout the day, with meals, for example. If the weather is hot or you're exercising, drink more water than usual. Don’t wait until you feel thirsty.

One of our registered dietitians recommends drinking an electrolyte replenishment drink, like Gatorade, if you’ll be exercising for an hour or more in hot weather. Heavy sweating robs the body of potassium and sodium.

Fortunately, treating dehydration is simple in its early stages. Try sipping water or sucking on ice cubes. Don't take salt tablets, because they can cause serious complications.
For more severe dehydration, you may need to go to the hospital and get intravenous fluids.

If you're headed out for a walk, to the lake, or on a mountain hike, be sure to take plenty of water along. Don't count on drinking from streams and other natural waterways. That can put you at risk for nasty diseases like giardiasis and norovirus.

Next time you head out to enjoy the summer sun, take along your bottle of dihydrogen monoxide and raise a toast to our gorgeous Montana scenery.