

# PUBLICATION

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## Women's Health Tip: Women and Water

July 21, 2014

Did you know that more than half of the human body is made up of water? That is not fat, not muscle, but purely water – simple H<sub>2</sub>O. As a result of our body composition, hydration is key to the maintenance of optimal health. Losing even a small amount of water, as little as two percent of our body weight, can have serious health consequences.

Dehydration can cause muscle cramps, fatigue, headaches, loss of memory, and can, in drastic situations, result in death. In the long term, infrequent water intake has been linked to problems such as kidney stones, urinary tract infections and prolonged labor in pregnant women. Research suggests that mild dehydration, which may not even make you thirsty, can increase stress and anxiety. While scientists are still trying to determine the causation, they suspect that lack of water affects nerve cells that control mood and behavior.

While we have often heard that women should have eight glasses of water a day, that amount may not be sufficient for every person. In general, the Institute of Medicine recommends that the average woman get at least 11.4 cups of water a day, which includes fluids from food. On average, a person will eat around 20 percent of their daily-recommended water intake from foods like tomatoes (94 percent water), strawberries (92 percent water), zucchini (95 percent water) and cucumbers (96 percent water). In order to maintain optimal health, we should focus on hydration and continue to drink water both during meals and outside of meals as well.

When exercising, the American College of Sports Medicine has recommended pre-hydrating or drinking 16 ounces of water four hours before exercise. Of course, things like the intensity of your workout and the temperature outside affect the amount of water that you should be drinking. Here are some tips:

- Don't rely on thirst as an indicator for your body's need for fluids. By the time you are thirsty, you are already dehydrated.
- In general, drink as much fluid as you can tolerate before, during and after exercise. Drinking small amounts of fluids throughout the day usually works better than large amounts once or twice.
- General guidelines for fluid intake are two to three cups about two hours before exercise, one cup five to ten minutes before exercise, one cup every 20 minutes during exercise if it is warm.
- Drinking cool fluids is more effective than pouring cool fluids over one's head when dealing with hot temperatures.
- Proper hydration should result in pale yellow urine. If urine is darker than pale yellow, you need more water. Consistently crystal-clear urine means you are trying too hard to hydrate.
- As always, if you have health conditions such as congestive heart failure or certain kinds of kidney disease, it may be important to limit fluid intake. In such as circumstance, you should consult your doctor about how much water is appropriate.

In an effort to encourage hydration, below are links to recipes from *Women's Health* magazine, which are packed with hydrating fruits and vegetables, perfect for hot summer days and to encourage additional fluid intake. Additionally, they are good for busy women wanting to make healthy and varied family meals!

**Tabbouleh with Fruit:** Enjoy this versatile, fruit-packed dish as an entrée, side or even a satisfying breakfast. **Hydration helpers:** tomato (94 percent water), strawberries (92 percent water), cantaloupe (90 percent water), raspberries (87 percent water)

**Tomato Watermelon Salad:** A perfect mix of savory and sweet, this summery salad is a welcome break from lettuce and spinach. **Hydration helpers:** tomato (94 percent water), watermelon (92 percent water)

**Tuscan Baked Zucchini:** All the flavor of a hearty Italian meal, minus the meat. **Hydration helper:** zucchini (95 percent water)

**Heirloom Tomato and Eggplant Stacks:** These colorful towers of tomato, eggplant and goat cheese are instant crowd pleasers. **Hydration helpers:** tomato (94 percent water), eggplant (92 percent water)

**Cucumber Honey Mint Ice:** Cool off with this slimming summer treat – a serving is less than 70 calories. **Hydration helper:** cucumbers (96 percent water)

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## Resources:

*Women's Health*, Laura Bell, June 18, 2013, How to Stay Hydrated.

*Women's Health*, Hollis Templeton, July 30, 2012, 5 Recipes to Help You Stay Hydrated.

WebMD, Even Mild Dehydration May Cause Emotional, Physical Problems, January 20, 2012.  
<http://www.webmd.com/women/news/20120120/even-mild-dehydration-may-cause-emotional-physical-problems>