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Local Health

By Terry Burns, UVMC President/CEO

I was reading an article recently that said dehydration is one of the most frequent causes of hospitalization among people over the age of 65. Another article noted that most adults live in a chronic state of dehydration.

I want to improve my health, but finding the time (and motivation) to exercise is something I struggle with. I can, however, drink more water if I make it a priority.

About 60 percent of our body weight is made up of water. Most of our bodily functions—nourishment, waste removal, healing—require water to be successful.

In our culture, when we reach for something to drink, many of us favor all sorts of alternatives to water: sodas, coffee, tea, juice, sports drinks, etc. While we may feel less thirsty afterwards, we haven't satisfied our body's need for water. In fact, sometimes we've increased the need (diuretics like coffee and tea actually make our body give up water).

When the body doesn't have enough water, it can't clean itself. Waste materials and toxins build up, which can result in disease, or at least feeling crummy and tired.

So, how much water should you drink in a day? According to the Mayo Clinic, there are a few different approaches to calculating this number (<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/water/NU00283>).

Replacement approach. The average urine output for adults is about 1.5 liters (6.3 cups) a day. You lose close to an additional liter of water a day through breathing, sweating and bowel movements. Food usually accounts for 20 percent of your total fluid intake, so if you consume 2 liters of water or other beverages a day (a little more than 8 cups) along with your normal diet, you will typically replace the lost fluids.

Eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day. Another approach to water intake is the "8 x 8 rule" — drink eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day (about 1.9 liters). The rule could also be stated, "drink eight 8-ounce glasses of fluid a day," as all fluids count toward the daily total. Though the approach isn't supported by scientific evidence, many people use this basic rule as a guideline for how much water and other fluids to drink.

Dietary recommendations. The Institute of Medicine advises that men consume roughly 3 liters (about 13 cups) of total beverages a day and women consume 2.2 liters (about 9 cups) of total beverages a day.

Even apart from the above approaches, if you drink enough fluid so that you rarely feel thirsty and produce 1.5 liters (6.3 cups) or more of colorless or slightly yellow urine a day, your fluid intake is probably adequate.

So, if I can improve my health by reaching for a glass of water instead of Diet Coke, I'm going to try. (I didn't say I'm giving up Diet Coke, just that I'll substitute water for Coke more often.)

I'm always happy to hear from readers about this or other health-related topics. I can be reached at 707.463.7360.

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