



# The Natural Health and Fertility Centre

[www.naturalhealthfertility.com](http://www.naturalhealthfertility.com)

## A focus on your diet: beverages

The saying 'you are what eat' is only partly true. Most certainly what we eat reflects our health, however, it is our hydration that truly defines who we are. The human body comprises of between 45-75% of water, depending upon factors such as age, gender, and the proportion of adipose (fat) tissue and lean muscle tissue. In lean adult males water contributes about 60% of total body mass, whilst for lean adult women water is responsible for about 55% of total body mass. Water in the body is the fluid in which all life processes occur. Water is the essential nutrient as life cannot exist without this substance Human beings can survive only a few days without water whilst they can survive much longer without food.

### **Thirst and dehydration**

Thirst, or the desire to drink, is initiated when changes are detected by the mouth, the nerves, and a part of the brain called the hypothalamus. When the amount of fluid in the blood falls (and blood becomes more concentrated), the hypothalamus instructs us to drink. It is important that the desire to drink is not ignored and that fluids are promptly consumed, particularly in those that are most at risk of dehydration such as athletes, children and the elderly.

Interestingly, what you may consider to be a sense of hunger may actually be thirst. Our brains tend to confuse the signals quite easily so before you grab a snack, have a glass or two of clean, pure water and then reassess your sense of hunger.

Dehydration may occur due to inadequate intake of water, or from excessive water loss. Symptoms may include weakness, dry mouth, reduced production of urine, concentrated urine, poor concentration, exhaustion, delirium, and if not corrected, death. One of the most common symptoms of dehydration is a headache. In our busy schedules drinking enough water is easily forgotten. Next time you have a headache, drink a glass or two of water. You should feel relief within 20 minutes.



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## What should I drink?

Obviously pure water is the best option, however, other beverages are also beneficial including:

- Pure water preferably spring water to supply a balanced profile of electrolytes
- Low sodium natural mineral water – remember imported types are generally the best options. Brands such as Pellegrino or San Benedetto typically contain a good electrolyte profile with low sodium. Sodium is obviously not hydrating and disturbs the potassium balance (Sodium is an extra-cellular mineral whilst Potassium is an intra-cellular mineral. They work together to maintain hydration inside and outside the cell and when one is super concentrated the other is deficient causing a disturbance). It is best to avoid mainstream 'mineral waters' as they are typically tap water (key for pollutants) with added gas and salts (key for high sodium).
- Fresh vegetable juices such as carrot, beetroot, celery, parsley, ginger, spinach and others mixed with small amounts of fresh fruit juices such as apple, orange, pineapple, grapefruit, lemon or lime
- Herbal teas such as Chamomile to settle the nerves, Peppermint to improve digestion, Lemon Balm to soothe the mind and hyperacidity, Rooibos for its antioxidant property, Ginger to improve circulation, Ginkgo to improve brain function, Verbena to relax the muscles, Dandelion (leaf) to clear toxins and act as a diuretic, and many others. The trick is to try as many varieties as you can as you will find that each tea offers unique properties in addition to hydration potential
- Coffee replacements such as Dandelion root which is also beneficial as it acts as a bitter and helps to support optimal digestive and liver function. Other alternatives such as Caro, Ecco, Teecino and Bamboo are other tasty options.

## What shouldn't I drink?

- Tap water is full of pollutants such as heavy metals, various chemicals and xenobiotics. Make sure you drink filtered (or preferably spring) water to optimise healing potential of this vital nutrient
- Coffee contains a family of chemicals called xanthines, which include caffeine, theophylline, and theobromine, which stimulate the central nervous system and cardiac muscle, and relax smooth muscle. Most importantly they act on the kidneys to produce diuresis (release of urine). If you are trying to optimise hydration this function is certainly undesirable.



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- Black, White or Green tea and Oolong tea all contain caffeine and tannins. Caffeine acts as a diuretic and the tannin content acts as an astringent (dries out tissues - think of the tannins used in the leather industry...)
  - Black tea is rolled, fermented and dried. This leads to oxidation and condensation making it less antioxidant but more astringent.
  - Green tea is heat-treated and rapidly dried, then rolled. It contains higher levels of antioxidants.
  - White tea is the uncured and un-oxidised tea leaf. It contains buds and young tea leaves, with higher caffeine than older leaves, suggesting the caffeine content of white teas may be higher than that of green teas. White tea also contains higher levels of theanine (an amino acid that has relaxing and mood enhancing properties)
  - Oolong tea is semi-fermented and is therefore, in between black and green teas.
- Soft drinks – apart from the obvious sugar or artificial sweetener content, soft drinks contain large quantities of phosphorous, which leach calcium from your bones and prevent the uptake of magnesium. In addition, negative impact to your kidneys can also be expected.
- Alcohol provides 7 calories/gram (approximately 29 kJ). As such, it is a very high kilojoule beverage [FYI Lipids provide 9 calories/gram (approximately 37 kJ)]. In addition, added ingredients including yeast (beer), sugar, caffeine and others make some alcoholic beverages completely unhealthy. There is great research on the health benefits of drinks such as red wine but there is no study that supports overconsumption. Recommendations are typically 1-3 standard drinks per week.
- Sports drinks contain large amounts of sugar and electrolytes as well as colourings, additives and other goodies. Home made electrolyte replacement drinks of vegetable juice (fresh) with honey/molasses and sea salt work even better.
- Energy drinks typically contain enormous levels of sugar, caffeine and guarana (caffeine rich) to stimulate the body. Caffeine content can be as high as 5x 1 cup of instant coffee... Don't even get me started on the sugar content!
- Bottled fruit or vegetable juices are unlikely to be a good source of nutrients. Just think – when was that orange/apple/grape on the tree? How long has this been in transit before I drink it? In addition, they are typically rich in concentrated sugars and can be equivalent to multiple teaspoons of sugar. 100 percent juice, no sugar added contains about the same amount of sugar (or even more) as the same volume of Coke (approximately 10 teaspoons per glass).



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## **Conclusion**

If you choose to drink coffee, tea or similar beverages a simple strategy of drinking one extra glass of water per coffee (for example) is an easy way to improve your fluid balance.

It is certainly worth considering what you are drinking and the potential ramifications on your health. Similarly to previous suggestions, it would be beneficial to document your weekly fluid intake and review. Making sure you drink the right fluids and in the right quantity will ensure optimal health in all aspects.

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*For more about Leah, please see her page: [www.naturalhealthfertility.com/Leah.html](http://www.naturalhealthfertility.com/Leah.html)*