

HEALTHY LIFESTYLES

Some thoughts on sports drinks, fancy beverages and plain old water

By FUAD AL QUDSI

GROWING UP in the Arabian Peninsula of Saudi Arabia, where temperatures can easily reach triple digits in the summer, I remember playing soccer in high school, when I didn't really understand the importance of hydration and how it impacted my performance and health. However, after an incident of severe dehydration, I was admitted to the hospital and given IV fluids. That's how I learned how critical drinking water is.

Staying hydrated isn't always easy, and many of my clients admit to not being the best at it. But even when it's cool and foggy, staying hydrated is paramount. Water is crucial for maintaining normal body temperature, lubricating and cushioning joints, protecting the spinal cord, and eliminating waste through urination, sweat and bowel movements.

Though we've all heard the age-old recommendation of eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day, no one really knows where that notion came from. It's also not necessary to carry around a gallon of water everywhere you go. Instead, focus on sipping on water throughout the day and drinking at least 32 ounces for each hour of exercise.

Many alternatives

It's also important to remember that water isn't the only thing that can contribute to your fluid goals. Non-caffeinated tea, milk and even soup can go towards keep-

ing you hydrated as well. That said, there are plenty of commercial drinks out there, so let's take a quick look at them:

Gatorade: Also under this category are brands like Pedialyte and Electrolit. These are called "electrolyte" beverages, and contain minerals including sodium, potassium and sometimes calcium. They are ideal if you anticipate sweating a lot, because people lose these minerals, especially sodium, in sweat and they must be replaced.

Electrolytes play a major role in muscle contractions (which is why people get cramps when dehydrated) and moving fluid to where it needs to go. That's why hydration is not just about having enough fluids, but enough electrolytes in our system as well.

Alkaline water: Brands like Smart Water and Essentia offer water with added minerals like magnesium carbonate and sodium chloride to make it more alkaline. They claim it's healthier in fighting inflammation and improving health.

However, science has shown that nothing we consume can change the alkalinity or acidity in our bodies, since food and drink are neutralized in the digestive process. Thus, while these drinks can certainly still hydrate you, the alkaline properties are nothing but buzz.

Coconut water: Though it is touted as a superior hydration beverage, its biggest downside is that it contains virtually no sodium, despite being rich in potassium. Considering sodium makes up most of what we lose in sweat, coconut water does little to replenish the body's electrolytes. However, if you like the flavor, it can still contribute to fluid intake.

The bottom line is that drinking enough fluid throughout the day is pivotal to mak-



Although our coastal weather doesn't get too hot, water is still critical to good health.

ing sure our bodies are operating at their best, maintaining energy, and preventing cramping. If you tend to sweat heavily or if you spend a lot of time in the heat, be sure you're getting enough electrolytes as well. No matter how you choose to hydrate, just

be sure to do it gradually and consistently throughout the day.

Fuad Al Qudsi is a registered dietitian with a bachelor's degree in human nutrition and food science. Learn more at fuad-fit.com.

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