



The importance of adequate hydration MS

Hello again and welcome!

Welcome to my new subscribers...and hello again to my existing supporters. Thank you for signing up to receive my blog; I hope you find this week's content interesting and feel it was worth subscribing to.

Diana xx



What's the big deal about hydration?

Water is essential to maintain life and health. At birth the human body is made up of around 70% water which decreases with age; in the elderly water comprises around 55%. The balance also differs

between the sexes with males generally holding more water, and females holding more body fat. Water has functions both within and outside of the body's cells providing a host-environment to maintain vital chemical processes.

To remain adequately hydrated - and to prevent dehydration - it is important that water lost through essential bodily processes including breathing, sweating and urination, is replaced. The frequently cited first signs of dehydration are a feeling of thirst and a dry, sticky mouth; but by the time the body had noticed a reduction in water, processed the deficit and sensed the need to respond with a 'feeling of thirst' response the body is already dehydrated.

Other symptoms of dehydration include:

- feeling lightheaded
- headache
- lack of energy
- dark coloured urine

- poor concentration

Water plays a key role in vital processes within the body, including:

- formation and maintenance of blood plasma, tissue fluids and lymph
- effective passage of substrates into and out of cells (including circulation of nutrients via the blood and removal of waste)
- providing a suitable environment for chemical cellular processes
- provides lubrication to our joints and protection for our organs
- transportation and filtration of waste products for excretion
- maintenance of consistent body temperature and subsequent a cooling function through sweating

How can dehydration affect my symptoms?

One of the first pieces of advice my neurologist gave me was to make sure I made a point of staying hydrated, especially when exercising. When I did some digging around the research on this I realised how valuable it was. Dehydration had been shown to make many of our MS symptoms worse, notably:

Fatigue

Much of the recent research on fatigue has looked at hydration status; not an unexpected jump given that in people without MS a small drop in hydration can bring on tiredness and confusion. This work is still ongoing but it seems it could be a promising part of the fatigue-puzzle,

Urinary tract infections (UTI)

We know that some medications used to treat MS can irritate the bladder and cause UTIs; but UTIs and bladder difficulties are a symptom and complication of MS themselves. Some people with MS (PwMS) choose to limit their fluid intake to try to avoid bladder difficulties, but this in itself can lead to development of UTIs and subsequent dehydration.

Constipation

Adequate fluid intake is important to help to prevent constipation and bowel difficulties; constipation has been shown - in some cases - to affect spasm and spasticity and also aggravate bladder symptoms although specific mechanisms remain unclear.

Heat-related exacerbations (Uhthoff's phenomenon)

Heat (and in some cases cold) has been shown to being about a temporary worsening of symptoms; adequate hydration can help to maintain a consistent body temperature to help to manage this.

How much fluid do I need?

The amount of fluid required depends on various external/environmental factors, including:

- Environmental temperature
- Body temperature
- Humidity
- Physical activity
- Respiration rate

In the UK, drinks provide 70-80% of our water needs with the remaining 20-30% coming from foods such as soup, fruits and vegetables,

The guideline amount of fluid to consume per day for adults and the elderly is 2,000ml for males and 1,600ml for females. Guidelines for pregnant and lactating women are slightly different (BDA, 2017). If you are interested in the guidelines for children and infants drop me a note and I can send on separately.

Water helps to regulate body temperature which can be important when exercising with MS. It is important to increase fluid intake whilst exercising in order to replace fluid lost through increased respiration and sweating.

Common household measures include:

1 medium sized glass = c.200ml

1 can of fizzy drink = 330ml

1 mug = c.250ml

1 cup = c.200ml



What type of fluid counts?

Ultimately the type of fluid you consume is up to you, however water (either tap, filtered or bottled) is a healthy option. Tea and coffee count too and can be a useful way of helping elderly family and friends to drink more, but be mindful of the caffeine content. Fizzy drinks contain a lot of sugar as do fruit juices so should



be limited. Fizzy drinks can contain a lot of chemicals, sweeteners and sugar which make them a less-healthy option; they also contain caffeine which can prove dehydrating and counteract any benefit of fluid intake.

How can I tell if I'm drinking enough?

It can be tricky to know how hydrated you are; generally as soon as you feel the first symptoms of dehydration (ie thirst and dry, sticky mouth) you will find a drink which makes you feel better but you will generally stop drinking before you are fully re-hydrated. The colour of your urine is the best indicator; if you are drinking enough your urine should be straw-coloured or pale yellow in appearance.

Some lifestyle factors can affect how much fluid you need...

Regardless of your fluid intake, some additional lifestyle factors can complicate the body's absorption and use of water and bring about dehydration, Some of these can include:

- caffeine
- salt
- sugar
- alcohol

Caffeine (often found in fizzy drinks and coffee) and alcohol can both irritate the bladder and affect symptoms which can further impact dehydration.

Some practical tips to increase your fluid intake

My husband calls me a camel (a bit rude I feel) as I carry water everywhere; in my handbag, in the car, gym bag etc and I drink a lot of water. I suppose I'm lucky as I don't dislike the taste of plain water, but said husband finds it 'boring' and prefers it with some flavour.



Some easy/fun ways I've found to make it more interesting include:

- sliced fruit in a big jug in the fridge topped up with water. Favourites are: sliced lemon, lime, basil & cucumber, ginger and orange.
- sometimes I quickly squeeze half a lemon or lime into a water bottle to take out with us
- occasionally I freeze homemade smoothie into ice-cubes to put into a large jug/bottle of water
- a friend uses the 'ten-glug rule' taken from a favourite US fitness couple, where every time you go to have a drink you must take 'ten-glugs' before putting it down
- to make water more interesting for children I have sometimes frozen blueberries, raspberries or chunks of strawberry into ice-cubes which can be fun when they melt (provided they like the fruit in the cubes!)



As always, the last word from me...

Do let me know if you have found this post helpful. Send me an [email](#); join me on Twitter (@healthylifems) or send me a message through the contact page on the website, I'd love to know what you think.

Diana xx

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Thank you for reading :)

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