

H₂O to Go!

Hydration

It is easier than you think to become dehydrated.

Humans are more than 60% water. It only takes as little as 2% of water loss to become dehydrated. When we are dehydrated, our performance drops off. What can cause water loss? It does not take much. It can happen to an athlete who is competing, to someone who is in bed with the flu, or even to someone who does not drink enough water.

No water, no go....

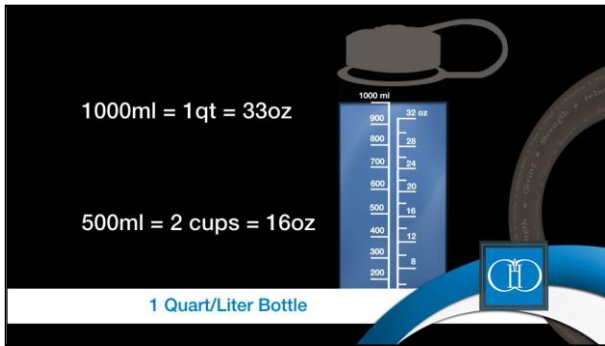
What happens to your body when you are dehydrated?

- Your urine will get dark and you may have less urine output.
- Your brain may not work properly – you may feel groggy, slow, or have headaches.
- Your muscles may not work as effectively or you may feel weak or have muscle cramps.
- Your kidneys will not function properly and waste products will back up in your body.
- You will have more trouble regulating your body temperature; you may feel overheated, or you may feel chronically cold and unable to get warm.
- You may get constipated
- Your metabolism decreases, making it easier to gain weight.
- You may feel hungry all the time and will likely to eat more.
- Your skin and lips may get dry.
- You may feel dizzy if your blood pressure drops.

It is even a bigger deal if you have a spinal cord injury

All of the things we just listed can happen to anyone who gets dehydrated. However, at least half of these problems are also things that doctors and researchers tend to worry about happening in people with spinal cord injuries – *regardless of whether they are dehydrated!*

Think about body temperature. You have already heard about how hard it can be to regulate, especially if you have quadriplegia.



What about constipation? You have already heard about it and probably even experienced it.

Doctors and SCI survivors alike also worry about skin condition, metabolism, and kidney function. Since all these things are affected by dehydration, drinking water and keeping hydrated is especially important for people who have spinal cord injuries.

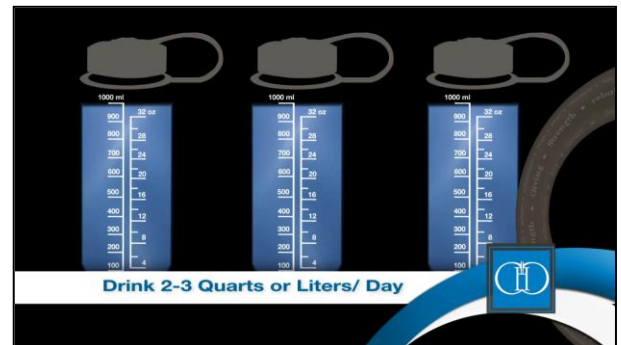
How much should I drink?

Drinking at least 2000 to 3000 ml of water every day is important. This is equivalent to about twelve, 8 oz. glasses or about 3 quarts of water every day. There are great benefits to constantly flushing out your kidneys and bladder.

When to increase water intake

You will need to increase your fluid intake if you are:

- Exercising
- In warm weather or warm environment
- On a high fiber diet or taking fiber supplements (*Fiber soaks up lots of water*)
- Trying to lose weight
- In high altitude where the air tends to be drier and evaporation occurs faster
- Traveling, especially in airplanes where the same air is re-circulated over and over again, which also may make the air drier
- Sick – like a cold or a bladder infection. Fevers, vomiting, diarrhea all cause you to lose or use up large amounts of water, which needs to be replaced
- Sweating excessively
- Consuming alcohol or caffeine
- Have high blood sugar
- Taking medications that require large amounts of water



A special warning for SOME SCI patients:

Doctors recommend large amounts of water for *most* people with spinal cord injuries. We did not say *all* people with spinal cord injuries.

If you use a bladder program that involves intermittent catheterization, you may be urged to restrict your fluid intake so that you are not needing to catheterize more frequently. If you are on one of these programs, your health care professional should have developed a plan that balances what goes in – what you drink – with what comes out – how often you catheterize yourself.

It is not a good idea to reduce how much you drink simply for the convenience of catheterizing yourself less often. This could leave you not only thirsty, but dangerously dehydrated as well. Check with your doctor first. If you are on an intermittent catheterization program and you do not think you are getting drinking as much fluid as you want or need, you should also check with your urologist or spinal cord injury doctor. He or she might be able to help you adjust the balance between how much you drink and how frequently you need to empty your bladder.

Also, if you have a medical history of electrolyte imbalances, talk with your doctor about the amount of water you should drink daily. Your water needs may be adjusted based on your health history.

A few more pointers.....for EVERYONE:

Regardless of what kind of bladder management program you use, keep these points in mind:

- Drink alcohol in moderation followed by additional water or avoid alcohol all together.
- Drinks with caffeine do not help meet your water requirements. In fact, they can cause you to *lose* water by increasing your urine output. So, if you use caffeinated drinks, increase your water intake as well.
 - If you drink four cups of coffee, you may need more than eight cups of water per day to make up for what the caffeine causes you to lose. If your fluid intake is restricted to begin with, you may want to avoid caffeine entirely, or at least greatly limit these beverages.
 - Caffeine can be found in coffee, tea, soda, energy drinks, dietary, or weight loss supplements, and in some medications
- Sports drinks and juices do help you replace water, but they contain many calories. If you are not an avid exerciser, sports drinks really are not necessary; they are no better than plain water. If you are watching your weight, they may have far more calories than you need.

...an important but little known fact:

- Finally, know that your thirst sensation runs quite a bit slower than your body's need for water. By the time, you realize that you are thirsty; your body will already be suffering from lack of water. Most experts suggest that you drink *before* you get thirsty. If you are exercising or even pushing your chair a long distance – drink water before, during, and after.

It is not always easy to change habits, but here are some suggestions:

- Keep a water bottle with you throughout the day. If you have limited hand function, maybe a large tube could connect the bottle and your mouth.
- Some people have used a “Camelback” or similar water systems that they wear like a backpack. Know how much water the system holds so that you can easily keep track of your intake.
- Make it a point to drink a bottle or two of water every time you empty your leg bag.
- Drink before meals when you are hungry, rather than afterwards when you are already full.
- To stay better hydrated drink throughout the day.
- If you intermittently catheterize, try to do most of your drinking in the morning and afternoon so there is time to eliminate it all before bedtime. Follow your doctor's recommendations on how much you should drink and how often you should catheterize.
- Do not waste your drinking efforts on things like alcohol, coffee, caffeinated teas or sodas. A smaller amount of water will do more good than a larger amount of many other beverages.

How to know you are not getting enough water:

Check off the questions that you can relate to:

- ☐ Is your urine dark? (It should be a light yellow in color)
- ☐ Has your urine output decreased?
- ☐ Do you have frequent bladder stones or bladder infections?
- ☐ Are you frequently constipated?
- ☐ Is your skin dry or flaky?
- ☐ Do you feel groggy or have a headache during the day?
- ☐ Do you have trouble staying cool – or keeping warm?
- ☐ Do you have high blood sugar?

Answering yes to any one of these questions *can* mean you are not getting enough water. Any of these symptoms may get better by taking in more fluids, especially if you think your intake has not been adequate anyway.

Each of these problems or complaints could also be caused by something other than dehydration – sometimes by something very serious. If drinking more water does not solve these issues, please consult a physician.

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