

# HYDRATION

July 11, 2003

**W**e don't think of water as food, but it is as important to our health as any of the nutrients. Every cell in the body uses water. The human body is 60 -75% water. Without water, the chemical reactions and metabolic processes of the body would not take place. Water makes up the major portion of our body fluids and it is involved in every portion of life. Without it, we cannot digest food, have a functioning neurologic system, lay down bone, lubricate joints, regulate body temperature, and so on. The body will not function well if it is not well hydrated.

**O**n average, your body loses 8 - 12 cups of water a day. This is increased by: exercise, hot weather, low humidity, higher altitudes, high fiber diets, and consumption of caffeine and alcohol containing beverages. In general men need to replace about 12 cups of fluid daily and women need to replace 8 -10 cups (breastfeeding women need 12-14). Not all of this fluid is generally replaced by drinking water, although water is the major way of meeting your fluid needs. Replace fluid by drinking water, fluids without caffeine or alcohol, and eating soups and foods naturally high in water, such as fruits and vegetables.

**D**rink at least 8 cups of water a day. You can count skim milk, 100% fruit juice, and decaffeinated teas as part of this because they are mostly water. If you engage in heavy exercise or spend much of the day outside in the Sicilian sun, increase your fluid consumption.

**Y**ou can judge your level of hydration by the color of your urine. Thirst and headaches are NOT accurate gauges of hydration. By the time you feel thirsty, you are already 1 to 1.5 liters behind. Your urine should be clear to very pale yellow. The darker and stronger smelling your urine is, the more dehydrated you are.

**W**ays to increase your water consumption: at work keep a large water bottle on your desk (and make sure you sip from it frequently), at home keep a pitcher of water in your refrigerator (and pour your self a glass of water frequently), carry a water bottle with you when you leave the house, change to decaffeinated coffee, tea and soda, instead of caffeinated beverages, for every caffeinated beverage you drink, drink a glass of water, drink a glass of water before meals and snacks, order water at restaurants, add lemon or lime to your water if it allows you enjoy water more.