



Water

Most humans are about 60 per cent water. That means that a 65 kg (144 lb) man contains about 40 kg (88 lbs) of water. The amount of water in the body is carefully controlled mainly through the production of urine. We also lose smaller amounts of water from the body in sweat, faeces and tears. We get water not just from drinks, but also from foods we eat that contain varying amounts of water.

Getting enough water

When someone is deprived of food and drink for some reason, they will always be affected first by dehydration (lack of water). The effects of lack of water begin with dizziness, confusion, feeling faint, muscle cramps, tiredness. If not treated, and the situation worsens, the person can die.

How much to drink

The general recommendation is that most adults drink 6–8 cups (a cup is 8 oz/200 ml) per day. You will need more than this, if:

- ☹ you are sweating a lot because it is hot or you are being active, or
- ☹ you have a fever.

During intense activity, you can lose up to three litres (more than five pints) of water in an hour through sweating. It is very important to replace this as soon as possible, by drinking during the activity (and not waiting till you have finished the game or activity).

What to drink

The best choice of drink is clean water. It is the best way to satisfy the body's needs for water.



Some of the need for water will be met from foods that we eat. Most food contains some amount of water; fruits and vegetables, for example, contain quite a lot.

Fluid is a term used to describe all drinks, including water. Fluid means something that contains water. For example tea, milk, and juice – these are all fluids that contain water together with other substances.

Juice: Pure fruit or vegetable juice (no added sugar) is a drink that is made from crushed fruit or vegetables. It contains some sugars and vitamins from the fruit or vegetable. While a healthy drink, it is quite high in energy and care needs to be taken in terms of weight control. It is also quite high in sugars, which can cause problems to teeth and affect diabetic control.

Fresh drinking coconut: This contains mostly water with a small amount of sugar and vitamins. Again care should be taken not to drink too much if weight control is a problem.

Tea, coffee: These drinks contain some chemicals that actually make the body produce more urine. This means they are not very good as a source of fluid for the body. If sugar is added, this means the drink is not good for teeth and can be a problem for weight and diabetes control.

Milk: This drink contains protein, and some vitamins. It is also very rich in calcium. It is classed as a body-building food. It is an ideal drink for children and adults. Full-fat milk does contain a bit of fat – so if a lot is drunk, people with weight or heart problems may want to try a milk that contains less fat ('low-fat' or reduced-fat milk).

Soft drinks, sodas, fizzy drinks, juice drinks: All of these drinks contain a lot of sugar with water; some also contain a small amount of fruit juice. The high levels of sugar in these drinks can be very damaging to teeth, and cause a problem for diabetics and people trying to control their weight.

The best drink to choose most of the time is clean water.

When do you need to drink more?

1. Most of our islands have a hot climate. Our bodies adapt to this higher temperature, so we sweat less than people who are not used to it. When you travel from a cooler climate to a warmer one, you will sweat more and need more fluid.
2. Activity – The more active you are, the more you will sweat, and the more fluid you will need.

3. Sickness – When you have a fever, your body temperature is higher and you need extra fluid. If you have diarrhoea or vomiting, your body is losing a lot of water and needs extra fluid.
4. Salt – If you eat a lot of salty foods, your body needs to use more water to get rid of this excess salt from the body. You often feel thirstier after you have eaten salty foods.
5. The young/old – generally people will drink more when they feel thirsty. Feeling thirsty is the body's way of getting more fluid when it needs it. The elderly, sick and young children often have a reduced sense of thirst, so they can 'forget' to drink, even though they need to.

Clean water

While some of our Pacific Island countries have systems that deliver clean and safe water to individual homes, many places do not have such systems. The Factsheet on food safety includes some information on the dangers of using unsafe water. It is essential to make sure that water used for drinking and for cleaning foods (that will not be cooked) is safe for use.

Boiling is the safest way to make water safe to drink. Bring water to a vigorous boil, and then allow it to cool; do not add ice. At high altitudes, allow water to boil vigorously for a few minutes, or use chemical disinfectants.



You can use either iodine or chlorine as chemical disinfectants. Read and follow the manufacturer's instructions to ensure safety.

Contact your local public health or environmental health office for more information.