

# healthier YOU

your healthy living newsletter

## WILL 8 GLASSES A DAY REALLY KEEP YOUR THIRST AWAY?



There's a lot of confusion these days about a simple but important concept: **water**. Are we drinking enough? Is this impacting our health? We've often heard that we should be drinking 8 glasses of water a day but recent media reports indicated that this may not be true. Different people in the nutrition and supplement industries are always recommending their own formulas for figuring out how much we should be drinking and these are sometimes quite different. I've even heard one physiologist suggest that if you don't have to get up to go to the washroom during the night, you're not drinking enough.

### So how do we know what we really need?

The answer is quite simple for most people – drink when you feel thirsty.

The Institute of Medicine, an independent U.S. National Academy of Science group that promotes evidence-based health recommendations to policy makers and health care providers, published some important recommendations on water intake in 2004.

These recommendations stated that for the vast majority of people, if we drink when we get thirsty, we're doing just fine. Contrary to what many in the sports world have been telling athletes over the years, that feeling thirsty happens before dehydration becomes an issue, not after it's already started affecting us.

Even caffeinated drinks and alcohol, formerly thought to be a problem because caffeine and alcohol are diuretics, are effective for ensuring that we are getting enough to drink (as long as their used in moderation).

### There are a couple of exceptions to this water rule.

The first is that as we age, our thirst sense becomes less sensitive. Older people (you can decide when you fall into this category but most of the research focuses on those 65 and older) should pay closer attention to their fluid intake and not rely entirely on the feeling of thirst. The second exception are people with kidney issues. Our kidneys are very important when it comes to regulating fluid balance in our bodies and ensuring that they have a relatively constant fluid level to work with, reducing the risk of over stressing the kidneys.

Exercise and heat can significantly increase water loss through sweating and we should be increasing our consumption under these circumstances. The same rule of thumb applies though, if you're thirsty make sure you drink. What is the best type of drink? Typically straight water is all that's needed unless we are sweating heavily. Sports drinks are often full of sugar are a large source of unnecessary calories. Sports drinks can be useful when it comes to replacing salts in our bodies as sweating can lead to significant salt loss. Under most conditions though, sports drinks should be reserved primarily for athletes exercising for long periods of time or people working in hot conditions. The rest of the time, water is a much more effective drink.

### So there you have it.

Despite all the opinions and folklore, research has shown that the simplest solution is actually the most effective. A little simplicity always helps.

## EXERCISE



With the days getting longer and the temperatures outside getting warmer, the idea of getting a bit more exercise often seems a little easier. Canada's physical activity guide outlines the multiple benefits of exercise including improved fitness, increased energy, reduced stress, weight control, and improved overall health.

There are many ways to increase activity levels without a gym membership.

- Walk to the mailbox
- Get off the bus a stop early
- Get off the elevator a level or two before your floor
- Walk to the water cooler regularly throughout the day
- Keep dumbbells or other exercise equipment in the room where you regularly watch TV put them to use
- Play with your kids (not video games)
- Park at the end of the lot so you can walk a little more
- Get up off the couch to change the channel
- Make a habit of a lunch time walk
- Get out of your chair every 20-30 minutes for a quick stretch

### Want to increase your fitness? Take public transit.

Canadian researchers recently published a study that showed public transit users are much more likely to get at least 30 minutes of exercise 5 days per week than people who commute by car. This level of activity has been shown to help reduce the risk of hypertension, coronary heart disease and obesity.

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# Do Topical Creams and Ointments Work?

Relieve short term pain but no long term gain...

If you walk down the aisle of the local pharmacy you'll see a wide variety of creams and ointments that are supposed to help relieve muscle and joint pain. There are also several creams behind the pharmacist's counter that offer the same hope in prescription strength. Researchers have shown that these products have fewer side effects than taking medications in pill form, but do they help relieve pain and injury? Unfortunately, probably not as much as the commercials suggest.

There are several different active ingredients that are used in the various products on the shelves today. Some common ones are menthol, camphor and methyl salicylate. Also available are several prescription anti-inflammatories.

Menthol and camphor cause a cooling sensation on the skin that may temporarily block pain signals coming from the area. They do not actually change the tissue temperature, instead they activate nerves that are sensitive to cold. These creams do not decrease inflammation and have not been shown to alter the healing process of the tissues in the area. Other than occasional allergic reactions, they are safe and can help relieve pain for a while.

Methyl salicylate is produced by several types of plants and is found in many commonly known creams. Methyl salicylate is part of the same family of medications as aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid). There has been limited research regarding the pain-relieving effect of methyl salicylate cream, although it has been well documented that the skin absorbs it very well and it functions very well as a "blood-thinner" similar to baby aspirin. This compound may provide some pain relief but more research is needed. People should be cautious however with excessive use. The Harvard Health Letter recommends those who are taking blood thinners, have aspirin allergies, or have cardiovascular diseases, consult their physician before use. At least one fatality has been reported as a result of excessive use by a 17 year-old runner in New York state.

Prescription anti-inflammatory creams have been shown to help reduce arthritis pain but only for the first two weeks of use. Again, topical anti-inflammatories have been shown to have far fewer side-effects than taking these same drugs in pill form. The main side-effect of these medications appears to be that about 2% of patients report minor skin reactions.

So the next time you're looking for quick pain relief, pay more attention to the active ingredients than the commercials.



## Spring Training Fitness Tips

Winter is finally gone and after a long 6 months of reduced activity or inactivity you maybe tempted to get outside and start training. You maybe also tempted to exercise at the same level you were last season. Such enthusiasm can increase your risk of injury. If you changed your routine this winter, it's best to ease back into shape slowly. Here are some tips to help you out:

**Slow but Steady.** Don't succumb to pounding it out on weekends. Try to get some exercise 3-4 times throughout the week.

**Increase Your Training Slowly.** Increasing your training more than 10 percent per week increases your risk of injury. To avoid this, increase your training gradually at about 5% per week.

**Remember to Have Fun.** Pick activities that you enjoy as these are more likely ones that you will continue with. You're not competing so just relax and enjoy the activity.

## Fun and Healthy Mother's Day Activities

Mother's Day is a great time to spend with your mom and you don't have to spend lots of money. Here are some activities that will keep you and your mom entertained and laughing. Isn't that what Mother's Day is all about?

### Work Up a Sweat

Going for a walk, taking a hike or bike riding are a great way to spend time with your mom. Make sure you choose an activity that your mom feels comfortable with and would enjoy. A stroll around the neighbourhood will suit some moms, where as rock climbing would suit others. Exercise releases endorphins so it's a guaranteed good time. Plus it would help burn off that Mother's Day cake!

### Have a Picnic

Give your mom a break. Pack a picnic and head to the neighbourhood park. You can cook/bake/prepare her favorite foods. After you've enjoyed the food with fresh air and conversations, go for a walk around the park and stop to smell the roses.

### De-Stress in the Garden

Did you know that gardening is a stress reliever? The scents of the fresh flowers are great aromatherapy and planting and weeding are great ways to get the body moving. Flowers like yellow daffodils, pink tulips and other pastel coloured flowers are known to have a calming effect on your emotions. So spend Mother's Day with mom in the garden. Who knows, you might enjoy it so much that gardening together will become a regular way to spend time together.



Coming up in our next issue:

Concept of Third-Hand Smoke  
Carpal Tunnel Syndrome

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