

Wonderful Water

from Laura Dolson; and Outdoor.com

We are bags of water. Or, more accurately, we are mostly a collection of tiny bags of water known as cells.

We are constantly losing water. It goes into the toilet (urine). It gets sweated off. When we "see our breath" or on a cold morning, or fog a mirror with our breathing, we can see that we lose water with every breath we take. We need to replace water continually - we can live much longer without food than without water. Even slight dehydration can produce a serious downturn in performance through an increase in body temperature. Your body needs adequate fluid stores to produce sweat that evaporates and cools the body, and to keep your vital organs functioning properly.

How much water do we need? You will hear all kinds of different recommendations about much much to drink, from 8 glasses of water per day or more, to "let your thirst be your guide". There are facts in favor of both of these approaches, but actually the amount of needed water varies for each individual on different days according to body type, activity level, temperature, and other factors. You actually need to replace one and a half times the volume of sweat that you have lost.

- Drink before you feel thirsty. Let me say that again, *do not wait until you feel thirsty before drinking* as thirst is a poor indicator of the need for fluids. A feeling of thirst usually means you've waited too long and you're already dehydrated. Signs of dehydration include headaches and fatigue. Keep yourself hydrated by drinking small, frequent amounts of fluid during any outdoor activity (two or three gulps' every 10-15 minutes) even when you are not thirsty. You'll still be generating heat, and perhaps sweat, and losing moisture from your body through your breath.
- It's fairly easy to get busy and ignore thirst until it gets extreme. Being a bit underhydrated can leave us feeling not at our best - sluggish, a bit weak, or having difficulty concentrating. More severe dehydration can cause more serious weakness (even fainting), dizziness, confusion, etc.
- When we exercise, or when the temperature is higher, we need more water. It's important to drink extra before, during and after exercise.
- Illness often brings increased needs for water. (You really should "force fluids" during colds and fevers.)
- If you have lost a lot of sweat, it is important that you have a drink that contains some salt (sodium) to help to rehydrate the body. Again, you actually need to replace one and a half times the volume of sweat that you have lost.