Dehydration Makes it Harder to Think Clearly

A new report in Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise discovered that athletes who lost fluid equal to 2 percent their weight showed lower levels of cognition. Water loss at that level is considered a mild to moderate case of dehydration, but researchers still found symptoms impaired cognition, including difficulties focusing on tasks requiring attention and lowered motor coordination. Executive function, the processes that allow you to manage yourself and achieve goals, also declines when dehydration happens.

“We’ve known that physical performance suffers at a threshold of 2 percent of body mass, particularly when it’s from exercise in a warm environment,” said study co-author Mindy Millard-Stafford, a professor in the school of biological sciences and director of the physiology lab at the Georgia Institute of Technology.

“So the question was, what happens in the brain with the same amount of loss, which is pretty common with people who are active or work outside in the heat. Just like a muscle cell needs water, so do the cells in our brain.”

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Drink

Water is still the gold standard of hydration. Eight glasses is the recommended daily amount of water. From there it can be difficult to sort through the latest and greatest hydrating hacks. These include but are not limited to coconut water, aloe water, fruit-infused water, and probiotic water. There are benefits to be had from these, but your best bet for

hydration without side effects is filtered or spring water and cranberry lemonade (unadulterated cranberry juice, lemon juice, and stevia).

Caffeinated, alcoholic, and sweetened beverages like coffees, tea, beer, and sodas are classified as diuretics, which is thought to lead to dehydration in the body. Beverages with high sugar content leads to a feeling of dehydration, as water in the body rushes to blood left unbalanced by sugar. Interestingly, milk does not cause dehydration as the sugars in the lactose cause the body to retain the water from it for longer, but dairy causes phlegm and inflammation in the body. Avoid these.

Eat

What you're eating is at least as important as drinking water. Fried and ultra-processed foods are high in sodium and notorious for drying out the body. Processed foods high in protein like cured meats are a doubly problematic, as they make your kidneys work harder.

On the opposite end of the spectrum are vegetables and fruit. You know, those foods you should be eating. Summer is the perfect time to eat for hydration, with water-heavy fruits and vegetables like melons, tomatoes, and cucumbers are abundant. Eating a salad daily will provide the body with nutrients it needs to function its best while also maintaining healthy water levels.

Recommended: *Stop Eating Like That and Start Eating Like This – Your Guide to Homeostasis Through Diet*

You Can Do It

It's only getting hotter, and this study confirms that dehydration can lead to serious issues. Even if you aren't an athlete, proper hydration is an important part of staying

healthy. Most of the food available at the grocery store can dehydrate you. If you aren’t peeing clearly, maybe it’s time to take a look at what you’re eating.

Sources:

- *Dehydration may muddle your thinking* – Reuters
- *Here’s Why Sugar Makes You So Thirsty* – Health.com
- *How to Tell If You Are Dehydrated* – Livestrong
- *9 Foods That Will Dehydrate You (Slideshow)* – The Daily Meal