

Water...Nature's best

Elixir of health



A Science of Medicine
The Art of Care

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Good, clean water is indeed the foundation of life, the key to excellent health, and the most vital form of nourishment. Without it we would not survive for more than a few days. Why? Because everything that happens in our body: every action, every metabolic step, from birth to death, needs water, and plenty of it.

The ancient pioneers of Tibb –Hippocrates, Galen and Ibn Sina – were well aware of its importance in the health

scenario, and intuitively included adequate water intake, as part of wholesome nutrition, amongst the top lifestyle

The Tibb Lifestyle Factors are: proper breathing, wholesome food and drink, regular physical activity, refreshing sleep, emotional harmony and efficient excretion

factors. They were keenly alive to the importance of moisture, alongside heat, as a major quality of human life. In addition, water was seen as central to the doctrine of humours, which explained the nature of health, disease and healing.

But even they were not fully aware of how important it really is, not only in the sense of nutrition, but in its role in removing toxins from the body, protecting vital organs, and keeping the body's many activities going. They certainly knew that the sound of running water was soothing to body, mind and spirit, especially during illness and convalescence. That is why water features like sparkling fountains were common in the clinics and hospitals of the time. They were very much aware of the dangers of dehydration, and that drinking clean water was a probably one of the best things for robust health – especially in the hot and dry climate of their times.

Modern science continues to show how important water is. Every cell in our body depends on our drinking enough water to make sure every part works properly. To start with, water makes up much of our flesh, (something like 75%), and even our bones (surprising to many, at 25%). But it forms a whopping 76% of our brains. As we probably know from our own observations, it is higher overall in babies and youngsters, and much lower in the elderly.

Water is also essential in other ways: for the digestion of food, the excretion of waste, the removal of toxins, the protection of the brain and other vital structures, and ensuring that the body stays at the proper temperature.

What happens when we neglect to keep our 'inner ocean' topped up with pure water is that the cells begin to shrivel. This is not a good thing: if it goes on for too long, our internal harmony becomes stressed, so imperilling our health. Ironically, this situation is under our own control, and easily avoided.

When we fall into the dehydration trap, we do not just get thirsty. When dehydration really sets in, our eyes sink into our skulls, our skin turns pale and elastic to the touch and we begin to pant. A throbbing headache may come on. Our urine output falls drastically, as does our blood pressure. The pulse starts to race.

What brings on this unpleasant ailment? Being exposed to very hot weather in our summer is a common cause, especially if we don't take precautions when road running or taking part in other severe physical activities. It can also develop in ailments, especially infections, where a fever develops, and diarrhoea and vomiting occur. Unfortunate burns victims often develop dehydration if not treated right.

What basically happens in dehydration is that our inner doctor – or Physis as it is known in Tibb – is thrown off balance. This sets off the alarm bells, so that we compensate by seriously increasing fluid intake. Our thirst reflex, a well-established Physis response, is set in motion, rousing us to drink, drink, drink ...

For common, less serious dehydration, upping the water intake regularly and systematically for several days usually does the trick, although consuming fruits and vegetables with a high water content, like beetroot, peaches, squash, melon, berries and pineapple, helps. Fortunately these are readily available to us in South Africa. For more serious cases of dehydration, urgent replacement of body fluids is vital, and is usually done by intravenous infusion.

Unfortunately, most of us do not drink enough fluids, or the right sort. Our modern lifestyle dictates that we consume plenty of beverages, colas and alcoholic drinks. These are not ideal, as they can actually cause water loss from our body if taken to excess. They should be supplemented with lots of pure, wholesome water. How much is somewhat controversial, and varies from person to person, age to age, whether ill or not, and between the sexes. As a rule of thumb, two litres a day seems to be the consensus; more if ill, exercising or elderly. This translates to 13 cups for men, 10 for women, and proportionately less for younger people.

We are not just what we eat, as the saying goes; we are what we drink as well. Drinking pure, natural water is good for our health, our finances and our ultimately our environment. It is one of the most healing things we can do for our bodies. In South Africa most of us are privileged to have access to it.