

H₂O

Hydrate to Go!



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Did you know the Arabian Camel can survive for up to six months without water? It's rare, but possible. While this humpy animal may remain unaffected by long periods without a drink, the same cannot be said for humans. With a body composition of 55 per cent to 75 per cent water, we need a daily supply of liquid to help keep body fluid levels topped up.

It may be of some surprise to know the human body is largely a flood of water, but it is probably no surprise that plain drinking water is recommended as the beverage of choice for kids and adults alike. In fact, the *Dietary Guidelines for Children and Adolescents in Australia* lists 'Choose water as a drink' as one of the 12 dietary guidelines, and the *Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults* lists 'Drink plenty of water' as one its guidelines.

Drinking water not only quenches our thirst, it is essential for many vital bodily functions. Water aids digestion, moving food through the digestive system. It also flushes out wastes and toxins,

maintains fluid balance and regulates body temperature through perspiration.

Our bodies lose water through urine, sweat and breathing—which amounts to around 1 – 1.5 litres of fluid a day. Fluid losses are much greater in hot weather and when working out. In dry air conditions, such as in an air-conditioned room or on an airplane, we lose quite a bit more fluid too.

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It's a fact that children are more likely to get dehydrated, especially from strenuous activity, than teens and adults. Some of the reasons for this are:

- Children don't perspire as much as teens and adults, so their body's 'air conditioning' system is less effective;
- Kids generate more body heat with exercise and don't adjust as quickly when they exercise in hot weather.



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The effects of dehydration are progressive. First comes thirst (at a loss of 0 per cent to 1 per cent body water), followed by a dry mouth, flushed skin, fatigue, headaches, impaired physical performance (at a loss of 2 per cent to 5 per cent body water). At the 6 per cent and above fluid loss mark, things start to get serious.

Dehydration in children can affect their ability to concentrate and so may impair their learning performance at school. This is just one of the many reasons why keeping kids well hydrated at school is important.

Good fluid choices

As you would already be aware, Fresh Tastes @ School (the NSW Government's Healthy School Canteen initiative) will commence first term 2005. This initiative not only targets foods served at the school canteen, but also beverage choices.

Let's take a look at some of the most popular beverage choices for children and see where they sit under the healthy canteen food spectrum:

Green beverage choices

Encourage and promote these drinks in the school canteen:

- Water – is the beverage of life and very quenching
- Reduced fat milk and soy drinks – plain and flavoured
- Fruit juice – only in containers less than 375ml, as large amounts can contribute to excess energy (kilojoules)

Amber beverage choices

These drinks may be sold, provided they do not dominate the beverage choices on offer:

- Full cream milk – plain and flavoured
- Fruit drinks – choose those with greater than 50 per cent fruit juice
- Fruit juices – applies to containers greater than 375ml, as they can contribute to excess energy (kilojoules)
- Diet/low joule soft drink & sports waters

Red beverage choices

These beverages may be sold on *two* occasions per term:

- Sugar sweetened drinks and ices – applies to soft drinks, flavoured mineral waters, energy drinks, sports drinks, sports waters, slushies, ice blocks and ice confections

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- Sugar sweetened drinks and ices with an *energy* content greater than 300kJ per serve and a *sodium* content greater than 100mg per serve fall into the RED section of the food spectrum.

In summary, drinking ample fluids is an important component of a healthy diet. Water is an excellent beverage choice, as it helps to hydrate the body without contributing additional energy (kilojoules) to the diet. Other drinks, such as reduced fat milk, 100 per cent fruit juices and low joule soft drinks can add variety, and in some cases (for example, milks and juices), add valuable nutrients to the diet.

