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Don't wait for feelings of thirst before seeking fluids. Once you feel thirst coming, you've already dehydrated yourself. Dehydration occurs when the amount of water in your body falls below normal, leading to an imbalance of electrolytes. Other signs to tell you're dehydrated include a reduced amount of urine that's darker yellow, a dry mouth, weakness, muscles cramps and in more severe cases confusion and unconsciousness.

Loss of body fluid means what it says; loss of water plus its contents (electrolytes) from the body. Electrolytes can be simple inorganic salts of potassium, sodium, calcium, magnesium or complex organic molecules. These minerals are lost through perspiration or other forms of dehydration, particularly in heat stress situations. Intake of plain water replaces part of the loss; intake of an electrolyte drink replaces fluids plus the lost simple inorganic salts, all of which keep the body functioning properly. Within seconds of drinking a correctly balanced electrolyte replacement, the electrolytes are put back where they belong and energy is restored.

Coffee and tea should be avoided as they act as a diuretic. A coffee drinker will have a significant loss of body fluid through increased urination.

While soft drinks, cordials and beverages are capable of providing carbohydrate food energy, they are largely empty calories. Soft drinks will make a person thirstier because of the extra solute entering the fluid environment surrounding the body cells.

Higher temperatures produce greater sweat losses and hence require a greater commitment to a fluid replacement program.

Independent tests in industry have shown that besides preventing dehydration, a regular fluid regime allowed subjects to work at a lower heart rate and at a lower relative workload. Psychologically, subjects reported feeling fresher, stronger more vigorous and more wide-awake when fluid was taken regularly.

Dehydration: The warning signs and what to do

Signs

Dry mouth, dark strong smelling urine, not going to the toilet often, flushed skin, muscle cramps, slower reactions, poor coordination, difficulty concentrating, exhaustion, headaches, irritability.

Prevention

Drink 2/3 cups of balanced fluid replacement before starting work, have small regular drinks throughout the day, avoid soft drinks, undiluted juice, tea, coffee, milk and alcohol before, during and immediately after work, have 2 cups of a balanced electrolyte replacement within 30 minutes of finishing work

Treatment for dehydration

Sit in a cool shady place, remove outer garments, have a large drink immediately, followed by regular small drinks until symptoms disappear, take care to maintain fluid intake throughout the rest of the day.

Recommendations:

Avoid suffering the effects of dehydration by regularly drinking a fluid, which is low in sodium and contains no more than 8% energy, at a rate of 0.5 to 1 liter per hour, especially on hot summer days. Ensure that fluid is readily available close to where the work is performed. Sqwincher, the Drink of Industry, is an electrolyte replacement drink scientifically formulated to replace mineral salts, replenish fluids and sugars at optimal absorption rates, which are depleted as a result of dehydration or through physical exertion. It prevents or reduces the severity of heat stress disorders and provides a supplemental source of energy plus quenches thirst.

Sqwincher has served industrial workers in North America since 1975. It is the only fluid replacement drink especially formulated for the high heat of the industrial workplace. Sqwincher has proved very successful at reducing heat related problems and improving worker productivity

