

## Helpful habits to healthy hydration

By Sarah Bolitho

### Water, water everywhere but do you stop to drink?

A slight paraphrase from an old saying but it is often so true – we have access to various sources of water, yet many of us are dehydrated without realising it. So, how do we know how much water to drink?

There is no definitive amount; we all have different needs depending on weight, activity levels, environment and health status, so a rough estimate is the best we can do. And this is where it gets confusing! Some sources say six to eight cups a day, others up to 12 cups – or more. Another method is to take half your bodyweight and drink that amount in ounces of water (e.g., 150lb/10.5 stone/68kg = 75fl oz/3.75 pints/2l). However, as even that is an estimate, the best gauge is how you feel, as when you are fully hydrated you just feel better!

Use the acronym, **WATER**, to help you create a hydration habit:

**WEE:** Check the colour of your wee. If you are hydrated, it will be a pale, straw-like colour. If it is darker or strong smelling, you aren't hydrated, so up your intake and get back to a pale straw colour.

**AWARENESS:** Be aware of common signs of dehydration, such as dry eyes or lips, feeling tired, headachy or dizzy, or being constipated. Gently pinch the skin on the back of your hand and, if it doesn't spring back, you need to top up. Also, feeling peckish may be a sign of dehydration, so drinking a glass of water can get rid of a feeling of 'hunger'.

**TOILET TRIPS:** If you are nipping to the loo fewer than three or four times in a day, you may need to drink more. Everyone is different but, as the average number of trips is between six and seven times in a 24-hour period, fewer trips may indicate low hydration levels.

**ENVIRONMENT:** We need more fluid in hotter weather or during exercise, and we lose water twice as fast at altitudes over 5,000 feet. Central heating or air conditioning both reduce moisture in the air, which affects the moisture levels of your skin and cells, so your fluid needs increase in all these environments.

**REGULAR:** If you want to up your intake but forget to drink, set an alarm to go off every couple of hours and take a fluid break. Start the day with a large glass of water and have a glass half an hour before each meal.

Despite what you may hear, most fluids count, so milk, tea, coffee and fruit juice can all be part of your intake – just make sure most of it is water and limit sugary drinks! Oh, and alcohol is dehydrating, so that definitely doesn't count!

Remember, it takes time to develop new habits, so start with one extra glass of water a day in the first week, then increase gradually until you feel you've hit the ideal hydration point for you. It can take upwards of 21 days to create a new habit and 60 or more days to make it stick, so keep going and remember to celebrate your progress.