Keep yourself hydrated

By ARUL JOHN

The body is about 60 per cent water. You constantly lose water from your body, primarily via urine and sweat. To prevent dehydration, you need to drink adequate amounts of water.

Health authorities commonly recommend eight 8-ounce glasses, which equals about 2 litres of water. This is called the 8×8 rule and is very easy to remember.

However, some health gurus believe that you need to sip on water constantly throughout the day, even when you are not thirsty. Many factors ultimately affect your need for water.

Many people claim that if you do not stay hydrated throughout the day, your energy levels and brain function start to suffer and there are plenty of studies to support this.

One study in women showed that a fluid loss of 1.36 per cent after exercise impaired mood and concentration and increased the frequency of headaches.

Other studies show that mild dehydration (1 to 3 per cent of body weight) caused by exercise or heat can harm many other aspects of brain function.

Keep in mind that just 1 per cent of body weight is a fairly significant amount. Mild dehydration can also negatively affect physical performance, leading to reduced endurance.

There are many claims that increased water intake may reduce body weight by increasing your metabolism and reducing your appetite. According to two studies, drinking 17 ounces (500 ml) of water can temporarily boost metabolism by 24–30 per cent.

Additionally, it may be beneficial to drink cold water because your body will need to expend more calories to heat the water to body temperature.

Drinking water about half an hour before meals can also reduce the number of calories you end up consuming, especially in older individuals.

One study showed that dieters who drank 500 ml of water before each meal lost 44 per cent more weight over 12 weeks, compared to those who did not.

So drinking water can cause mild, temporary increases in metabolism, and drinking it about a half hour before each meal can make you automatically eat fewer calories.

Both of these effects contribute to weight loss.

Several health problems supposedly respond well to increased water intake:

• Constipation: Increasing water intake can help with constipation, a very common problem.

• Cancer: Some studies show that those who drink more water have a lower risk of bladder and colorectal cancer, although other studies find no effect.

• Kidney stones: Increased water intake may decrease the risk of kidney stones.

• Acne and skin hydration: There are a lot of anecdotal reports about how water can help hydrate the skin and reduce acne. So far, no studies have confirmed or refuted this.

Trust your thirst

Maintaining water balance is essential for your survival.

For this reason, your body has a sophisticated system for regulating when and how much you drink.

When your total water content goes below a certain level, thirst kicks in.

This is controlled by mechanisms similar to breathing — you do not need to consciously think about it.

The thirst instinct is very reliable. That said, certain circumstances may call for increased water intake.

The most important one may be during times of increased sweating. This includes exercise and hot weather, especially in a dry climate.

If you are perspiring a lot, make sure to replenish the lost fluid with water. Athletes doing very long, intense exercises may also need to replenish electrolytes along with water.

Your water need also increases during breastfeeding, as well as several disease states like vomiting and diarrhea.

Furthermore, older people may need to consciously watch their water intake because the thirst mechanisms can start to malfunction in old age.

How much water is best?

No one can tell you exactly how much water you need. This depends on the individual.

Try experimenting to see what works best for you. Some people may function better with more water than usual, while for others it only results in more frequent trips to the bathroom.

If you want to keep things simple, these guidelines should apply to the majority of people:

• When you are thirsty, drink.

• Stop when you are not thirsty anymore.

• During high heat and exercise, drink enough to compensate for the lost fluids.

Note: This article provides general information only and is not a substitute for medical advice. Please consult medical or healthcare professionals for advice on health-related matters.