



Water in the Spotlight Part 6

Water & health: let's not cloud the issue...

by DOMINIQUE HURET

"Can't live without it" Dasani Water, "Your natural source of youth" Evian, "Anewlife everyday" Vittel, "Nothing but pure refreshment" Aquafina. Advertising slogans are constantly reminding us of the importance of a daily intake of water. But are the objectives of health and weight control justified or are these artificially created by "marketing"? Dominique Huret of Cape Decision consulting direct in, dived to this hot water topic.

As Planet Earth is now home to 7 billion people, the food imbalance persists: 3 billion undernourished for 4 billion humans at risk of obesity. Sad trophy: obesity is now the first non-infectious disease in history. Developed countries are mostly affected by this epidemic but not only...

The World Health Organization has declared prevention its top priority, especially in the field of nutritional pathology. With 8 million obese, France is not immune to this scourge. Rural areas and the Mediterranean regions appear to be more affected.

An additional disturbing factor: obesity affects an increasing number of younger individuals¹.

If undoubtedly genetic and endocrinological factors bear their share of responsibilities, they do not alone explain the explosion of obesity. Our societies change with a more sedentary way of life, where eating on the go and "junk food" take a larger place.

Indeed in the Western world, one calorie out of the five that we consume comes from a drink². The development of good hydration habits become essential to control health and weight and balance, and since early age.

One can never repeat it enough: obesity significantly increases the risk of diseases such as hypertension, type 2 diabetes, osteoarthritis, incontinence, infertility and not to mention several cancers. This is therefore a serious public health matter.

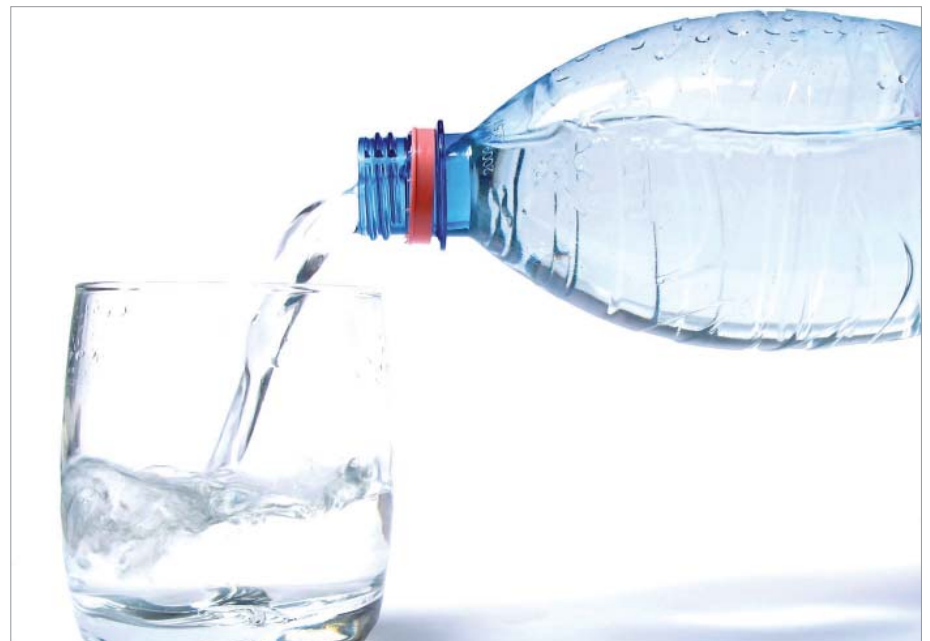
Important reminder: why does our body need water? Our human body consists

of nearly two-thirds water, so water stimulates effectively almost all parts of body³.

First, it is essential to breathing, by moistening the oxygen we breathe. Then the water in our body regulates body temperature. It carries nutrients and oxygen to all cells in the body. The water protects vital organs from shock and lubricates joints and muscles. The bones themselves, contain 20 % water.

The blood consists of 92% water and helps convert food into energy, a good waste disposal also requires water. Our brain also consists of 75 % water, and even mild dehydration in adults can cause headaches and dizziness.

A U.S. study has recently shaken public opinion by arguing that the majority of children arrive at school in the morning already dehydrated. It is now clear that even a slight dehydration cause a significant reduction in brain performance, while increasing hyperactivity in school children.



Photos: Dominique Huret



If unanimity rules on the importance of drinking, opinions differ on the amount of water and drink necessary for the proper functioning of our body.

In our temperate climates, we lose about 1.5 liters - 2 liters of water every day through breathing, sweat, urine and feces⁴.

To replace this lost fluid, various intakes are combined: variety of drinks, food itself (fruits and vegetables have a high moisture content) and also drinking water.



Official recommendations (source: EFBW)

- WHO: 1.4 to 4,5 liters per day depending on age, sex and climatic conditions (Domestic Water Quantity, Service Level and Health, WHO 2003)
- ESFA: 2-2,5 liters of water per day
- UK FSA: 1,2 liters of various fluids
French Agency for Food Safety: 2.3 liters with 1 liter from food and 1, 3 from drinks
- Belgian Superior Health Council: 2.5 liters with 1.5 liters of water

The Dietary Guidelines vary from country to country, however a general consensus among health professionals remains around 1.5 L - 2 L of fluid intake per day.

But vigorous exercise, hot weather and nursing mothers require additional intake for allowing the body to replenish daily water loss.

So how do we know if we drink enough water, when even a loss of 1% may deregulate our body? If thirst and fatigue can be symptoms of dehydration, the most common symptoms are a dried mouth, the skin losing elasticity, headaches, fatigue, weakness, dizziness, poor concentration, decreased or absence of urine.

A 10% decrease in water volume of the human body can be fatal. Top athletes are well aware: drink before thirst for optimal performance...

Mineral water, spring or table water is not the only solution to hydration. Other beverages provide nutrients and have a legitimate place on our tables, being part of our culinary heritage. Our shelves are overflowing with a wide choice of flavors, sugars, alcohol, caffeine drinks all the more tempting than the other.

It is just wise to ensure that younger generations do not cloud the issue: if hydration is health, then health is a daily water intake...

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Dominique Huret, expert for the beverage industries, has studied the latest EU directive 2009/54 as well as the Codex, reference book written by the World Food Organization and World Health Organization. Guide to elaborate national laws, the Codex is used to set up the different water categories as well as the criteria for exports.

References

¹ Caducee, association des professionnels de la santé

² Institut Danone pour la nutrition et la santé

³ E Jequier et F Constant, Water as an essential nutrient: the physiological basis of hydration, European Journal of Clinical Nutrition (2010) Macmillan Publishers Limited

⁴ EFBW, European Bottle Water Association, A Few Questions on Hydration