

Hydration for Shift Workers

HEALTH
HUB



Your body depends on hydration to survive because all your organs, cells and tissue need water to perform properly. Water makes up more than half of your body weight and you lose water all the time, especially while sweating when you're active. Working manual shifts keep you very active, and the more active you are, the faster you lose water.

If you don't replace this water, you can become dehydrated. Staying hydrated is critical to your health and well-being, but it can be difficult to maintain hydration during hectic 12-hour shifts or night shifts when you're more likely to be understaffed.

WHY IS HYDRATION SO IMPORTANT?

It's vital to drink water every day - about 6-8 LARGE glasses to be exact. Staying hydrated helps to:

- Promote clearer thinking
- Improve physical performance
- Boost your mood
- Fight off fatigue and drowsiness.

Proper hydration improves circulation and helps absorb shock on your joints, which can prevent aches, pains, and muscle cramps during busy shifts. Plus, staying hydrated can help prevent diseases, ease headaches, promote weight loss and stimulate clearer skin, which helps you stay healthy and happy.

SIGNS YOU'RE DEHYDRATED

Many shift workers forget about their own needs and don't recognize that they're becoming dehydrated. If you feel thirsty, chances are you're already dehydrated. Other signs you should never ignore include:

- Darker than usual urine
- Little or no urine
- Fatigue or sleepiness
- Difficulty concentrating
- Confusion or disorientation
- Dizziness or feeling lightheaded
- Extreme dry mouth
- Headache

Don't wait until you're already exhibiting symptoms of dehydration. Focus on prevention by drinking water every chance you get.

START YOUR SHIFT HYDRATED

If you're cool as a cucumber in air conditioning before your shift, you probably won't have to load up on water to keep your body temperature down, but you should anyway. Start your workday on the right foot by arriving hydrated and ready to go. Anything else will put you at a disadvantage and increase your risk of developing a heat-related illness.

WATER AND OTHER SUITABLE FLUIDS

Water is the best fluid for staying hydrated, but other fluids can also help improve hydration. Add to your water intake with fruit and vegetable juices, herbal teas, and milk. You also get some water from caffeinated drinks, such as soda, coffee, and tea, but take care not to overdo the caffeine. Too much caffeine can contribute to anxiety, insomnia, digestive issues, muscle breakdown, high blood pressure, fatigue, mood swings and frequent urination.

Sports drinks that contain carbohydrates and electrolytes can be beneficial during physically demanding or fast-paced shifts. These drinks help increase your water intake and energy levels while also replacing vital minerals that help balance the amount of water in your body.

However, steer clear of sports drinks that contain a lot of sugar, sodium and/or caffeine. Avoid energy drinks altogether, which aren't the same as sports drinks and overstimulate you with large amounts of caffeine, sugar, and other ingredients your body doesn't need.

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WAYS TO STAY HYDRATED

During long shifts, the only chances to get a drink is on a scheduled break, which isn't sufficient for proper hydration. An easy way to get more water is to keep a bottle of water with you throughout your shift.

If you're having a difficult time staying hydrated:

- Setting an alarm to remind yourself to drink water every two hours.
- Using a water bottle that has markers on with how much you should drink and by when.
- Drinking water or water infused with fruit, vegetables, or herbs if you don't like plain water.
- Eating fresh fruit that's full of water, such as melons, berries, and grapes.
- Limiting salty, fried foods that can contribute to dehydration.
- Replenishing electrolytes, especially in fast-paced and/or hot environments.

DRINK WATER EVEN WHEN YOU'RE NOT THIRSTY

When you're busy working, dehydration can quickly creep up on you, so don't give it the chance. It's recommended that drinking plenty of water every 15 to 20 minutes — even if you're not thirsty. If possible, keep a bottle of water nearby, so you can access it quickly and easily. Advise your colleagues to do the same and remind each other to keep taking water breaks.

AVOID CAFFEINE

Working shifts can easily make you feel tired, so drinking coffee, tea and fizzy drinks may seem like the way to perk up and stay hydrated, but it doesn't work that way. According to research, caffeinated beverages can effectively dehydrate you, so opt for low calorie / sugar sports drinks — Gatorade, Powerade, etc. — if you want something other than water.

BOTTOM LINE

When you start your shift work, it's time to concentrate on different ways you can stay hydrated throughout your long working shifts.

Try some of the tips suggested above or brainstorm with other colleagues you work with on ways you can

help each other remember and/or find time to drink more fluids.

AM I HYDRATED?

Using this chart may help you with realizing if you are hydrated or not. Please keep in mind that by the time you are in the mildly dehydrated zones it will take a while for your body to become hydrated again.



Use this urine colour chart to assess how hydrated you are. It is important to drink plenty of water each day to stay healthy.

