

Hot? Thirsty? Why Hydration is so Important!

by Julie Stevens, CRNP

As the summer sun beats down upon the Treasure Valley, and the daytime temperature soars toward 100 degrees it is easy to see how images of the Boise River or *Roaring Springs* come to mind when the word “Water” is mentioned. However fun it is to splash and play with our family and friends we must remember that water has a much more important role in our lives.

Water makes up about 60% of our total body weight, and plays a vital role in all our body’s processes. In order to function properly we need to ensure that we are adding as much water into our body as we are using in a 24 hour period. The average adult loses 2.5 liters of water each day (about 11 cups), and when the temperature is high, or our activity level is up that amount gets even higher! To maintain an appropriate level of body fluid the World Health Organization recommends that we drink 6 to 8 large glasses of water a day (12-16 cups). In fact if we are exercising vigorously in the heat our body can lose up to 4 liters of water in an hour!!!

When we start to lose more water than we are taking in we get dehydrated. Being dehydrated by only 2% actually decreases our physical and mental performance and makes exercise feel harder. As dehydration progresses to 5% we begin to feel sick. We might feel nauseated; we might vomit or even feel confused or dizzy.

Contrary to popular belief the feeling of thirst sets in **after** dehydration has already started. Exercise actually delays the thirst reaction, and can lead to a greater level of dehydration before feeling thirsty. This is why it is important to remember to hydrate before, during, and after exercise rather than relying on thirst to tell you when your body needs fluid. Try to drink at least half a liter of water before exercise to ensure your fluid levels are stable before you begin to exercise.

Although big industries spend millions of dollars each year to convince us that we need specially formulated *sports drinks*, the truth is that water is the best fluid you can choose for our daily fluid intake, or even during exercise of one hour or less. If you will be exercising for more than an hour, a drink with electrolytes and carbohydrates will help maintain your energy level, as well as help ward off dehydration.

So when you are heading out to enjoy all the summer activities that the Treasure Valley has to offer remember to carry water with you wherever you go, and don’t forget these helpful tips:

- ✓ **Try to drink more fluids than you need.**
- ✓ **Don’t rely on thirst.**
- ✓ **Drink before, during, and after any physical activity.**