



From the MAFP Presidents Pen -

Water Water Everywhere.....

By William Sturrock MD, MAFP President
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You can tell that we have passed into the New Year when the television starts advertising exercise machines and mail-order diets. It certainly is true that in our modern post-industrial world, most of us would be healthier with a lower body weight. The other fact-of-life is that someone is going to be eager to sell you his or her secret to weight loss. Unproven fads such as eating only raw food spun out of a pricey blender or taking a proprietary blend of herbs and spices 'guaranteed' to speed up your metabolism will continue to be sold to unsuspecting folks desperate to try anything to lose.

But what do we really know from an evidence-based standpoint about losing weight and maintaining that benefit for the long term? It is the basic trinity of:

1. Decreasing intake, especially of unnecessary snacks, especially carbs and fats
2. Eating more fresh vegetables (preferably the non-starchy greens)
3. Increasing exercise of all types, ideally by incorporating it into our daily routines for 45-60 minutes a day.

That's it, simply in a nutshell (like a healthy almond or walnut). However for those that really would like to be in on at least one proven weight loss secret, the word is 'water'. Yes, a large, well-designed study in 2010 showed that individuals who consume 2 glasses of water before meals lost 44% more weight than their cohorts who were also trying to diet. If you find that plain water leaves you uninspired, consider having a bowl of water-based soup or broth before the meal instead. (There's a reason why the cabbage soup diet works, at least temporarily). Another way of getting the water creatively is to drink a cup of black or unsweetened tea between meals. Research has shown that these beverages may have the additional benefit of appetite suppression which can be helpful for most of us.

What about the allegation that caffeinated beverages increase urine output and have a dehydrating effect on our water balance? Well, the kidney experts tell us that this is an urban legend, and the increased urge we have to urinate after drinking our morning eye-opener is due to the fact that the caffeine tends to irritate our bladder. Overall, with reasonable consumption (3 cups or less per day unless we are unusually sensitive to caffeine), the kidney will regulate the mild diuresis so that there is a net positive gain of fluid.



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The one mistake to avoid when trying to increase your fluid consumption is to substitute soft drinks or juice for the essential water intake. Studies now show that even the artificially sweetened sodas increase our risk for obesity. If you find plain water too boring, or if your municipal tap supply has a slight chlorine bouquet, then squeeze a wedge of lemon or lime into the glass. This flavor enhancer has the added benefit of preventing kidney stones for many who are so inclined!

The bottom line is that our health habits can be easily and inexpensively improved by remembering that we are animals composed of 60% water, living on a blue planet that is 70% water. We evolved in the unique life-sustaining medium of H₂O. Having communion with our world by consuming pure clean water (daily about 2 liters or 64 ounces as minimum, with added amounts for heavy exertion or hot weather exposure) is the simplest and safest secret to a healthier and less weighty New Year....

Have a Happy 2016!