

HYDRATION

Water. Water is life. Not drinking enough water is possibly the most common mistake made by hikers. No matter where you are walking, in heat or cold, adequate hydration should always be a priority. Always. Hydration is arguably the most important item on your supply list.

Before setting out on a hike, you should know where your water will be coming from. Sources of information can come from trip coordinators, maps, trekking notes, internet, or up-to-date local sources.

The big question is how much? How much you should drink depends on three main factors: climate, level of exertion and your own individual needs.

If you are hiking in hot and/or humid conditions, or at altitude, one litre per hour is generally recommended. In milder conditions or at lower altitude, half a litre per hour is generally sufficient.

If you are working hard, you will be losing more fluids and if you do not adequately replace those fluids, you may become dehydrated.

Also, each individual will have their own needs. No two hikers are alike. One hiker may need twice as much as another in order to feel properly hydrated. So how much should you drink? This is judged by personal experience. You need to listen to your body. If lacking in experience, it is always preferable to err on the side of caution – better too much than too little.

Some strategies for staying hydrated:

- 1) Carrying a hydration bladder (2-3 L) makes it easier to sip water on the trail, rather than having to stop to pull a bottle of water out of your pack. On longer or more intense trips, carry an extra litre water bottle with a sports drink like Gatorade or an electrolyte solution. Avoid caffeinated beverages, soft drinks, and alcohol as these drinks sap your body's fluids.
- 2) Do not wait until you are thirsty. It is too late by then. Even mild dehydration can sap your energy. In the morning you should make a habit of drinking at least ½ liter before leaving camp, or before beginning a day hike. This will help keep you hydrated for the rest of the day.
- 3) Eating salty snacks can help replenish your body's lost electrolytes.
- 4) A hat should be worn to provide shade from the sun. Shade will keep you cooler and therefore you won't need as much water to stay hydrated.
- 5) If hiking in terrain where you are filling water bottles, you should drink at least one litre of water before leaving the source. Then you won't have to carry as much to the next refill point, which means less weight on the back so less exertion is needed.
- 6) When hiking in hot, shadeless, dry conditions, you could do most of your hiking when temperatures are cooler – early morning and late afternoon or evening, resting in a shady spot for 3 or 4 hours in the heat of the day.
- 7) Experience will teach you how much water you need in different types of terrain and conditions. Then you will be able to aim at carrying enough water to keep you hydrated.

but not so much that you end up carrying a couple of litres extra which wastes energy. Of course, if you are not certain of water sources, it is wise to carry extra water.

- 8) If you are planning on using water sources along the way, you need to be prepared to treat and/or filter the water as often it is not safe to drink without treatment. A steriPEN is also an option to purify the water as is boiling the water first.

It is vitally important to remain hydrated especially on multi-day hikes. People can survive weeks without food but only for 3 or 4 days without water. When water intake has been insufficient, dehydration can occur.

Some early signs of dehydration are dry mouth, thirst, dizziness or light-headedness, headache, muscle fatigue, reduced urination or dark urine, irritability, nausea or cramps. Symptoms can vary from person to person. Treatment includes shade, rest, water with electrolytes (or with a bit of salt & sugar), cooling yourself by soaking your hat/bandana/shirt.

However, the best treatment for dehydration is prevention of it in the first place. The best way is to start hydrating at least a day in advance of your hike. Frequent and diluted urination is a good sign you are well hydrated. A general rule is that you will need more water to maintain hydration when you are hiking than when sitting around.