

Hydration challenge: Introduction



In climates such as in the UK, we should drink about 1.2 litres (6 to 8 glasses) of fluid every day to stop us getting dehydrated. The Hydration challenge encourages employees to increase their daily fluid intake over a period of weeks.

The body needs water:

- to transport water-soluble nutrients to organs around the body
- to transport toxins and waste products out of the body via urine
- to send electrical messages between cells – for example, to allow organs to function, muscles to contract and relax, and eyes to focus on images
- to control our body temperature, and
- to digest food and drink.

Some of the symptoms of dehydration have a specific impact on a person's ability to work to their full potential. Symptoms of dehydration include, for example:

- headache
- fatigue and irritability
- poor concentration levels
- mental confusion
- loss of appetite
- dizziness
- nausea
- constipation
- dark-coloured urine.

Further information on why it is important to keep hydrated is given in the Hydration challenge: Guide for employees and entry form.

Challenge objectives

- To encourage employees to have at least 1.2 litres (6 to 8 glasses) of fluid a day.

Challenge details

The Hydration challenge aims to encourage employees to increase their fluid intake gradually over a period of one month, to increase the amount of water that they drink at work, and during this time to consider the health benefits that this brings. The challenge focuses on water, but remember that other drinks also count towards daily fluid intake. However, high-sugar drinks should be limited, especially between meals.

How to start the challenge

Ideas for encouraging increased water consumption in the workplace

- Clearly signpost water facilities.
- Provide all employees with water bottles or glasses.
- Provide water coolers, water fountains or bottled water.
- Encourage each employee to fill a bottle of water and commit to drinking it all during the day.
- Run a campaign to promote the benefits of drinking water.
- Link a health promotion campaign to a water-based physical activity challenge, such as swimming, diving, windsurfing, sailing or canoeing.
- Provide access to drinking water in employee restaurant or staff rest areas.
- Provide drinking water in meeting and training rooms.
- Send email messages to encourage employees to drink water.
- Have 'water only' days.

Hydration challenge: Guide for participants

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Guide for employees and entry form

Your body is approximately 63% water. For example, an average 70kg male body contains 45 litres of water. The amount of water in our body will depend on our sex, age and amount of lean tissue (which contains more water than fat tissue).

In situations where someone is deprived of food, the body's metabolism adjusts so that it releases nutrients from the body stores. This means that the person 'digests' their own muscle and fat. With time, this results in the body 'wasting away'.

When the body is deprived of water, this has a very different, and a much more immediate, effect on the body because the body needs to use water in a variety of different ways. Water is needed:

- to transport water-soluble nutrients to organs around the body
- to transport toxins and waste products out of the body via urine
- to send electrical messages between cells – for example, to allow organs to function, muscles to contract and relax, and eyes to focus on images
- to control our body temperature, and
- to digest food and drink.

How often during your working day do you notice that you feel thirsty?

Do you sometimes think you're hungry when you are actually thirsty?

Thirst is a slow feedback sign that your body needs more water. By the time you realise that you are thirsty, you will already have lost between 1% and 2% of your body weight as water! Going back to our 70kg male body this would mean that he is lacking in nearly 1 litre of water!

There are many other symptoms of dehydration, some of which have a specific impact on a person's ability to work to their full potential. Symptoms include, for example:

- headache
- fatigue and irritability

- poor concentration levels
- mental confusion
- loss of appetite
- dizziness
- nausea
- constipation
- dark-coloured urine.

Not all the water in your diet needs to come from drinks. Many foods have a high water content – for example, fruit and vegetables – and foods can contribute around 10% of your daily fluid intake.

There is fluid in:

drinks and food.

Fluid is recycled in the body through:

digestion and metabolism.

Fluid is lost via:

urine, faeces, sweat, breath from your lungs.

So how much fluid do you need to drink each day? In climates such as in the UK, we should drink about 1.2 litres (6 to 8 glasses) of fluid every day to stop us getting dehydrated.

The amount we need is influenced by:

- how much exercise we do
- the climate, and
- what you eat and drink. Some foods and drinks – such as strong coffee, or alcohol – increase the production of urine.

To keep yourself well hydrated during the day, it is best to drink little and often, rather than waiting until you are really thirsty and then drinking large quantities. Drinks that contain caffeine – such as tea, coffee and cola – can act as mild diuretics. This means that they trigger the body to produce more urine, increasing fluid loss. Drinking some of these drinks each day is fine, but they should be balanced with fluids that don't contain caffeine. Also, check the sugar content of your drinks and avoid drinking too many high-sugar drinks. Choose sugar-free versions instead.

Hydration challenge: Record sheet

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ENTRY FORM

Getting started – Week 1

- Record how many glasses of water you drink during the time spent at work. You can use the record sheet for Week 1.
- At the end of each day, note how you have been feeling during the day.
- At the end of the week, calculate your average daily water consumption for the first week. You should be aiming to drink 4-6 glasses per day for the time you spend at work.

Weeks 2-4

- In subsequent weeks, aim to increase your intake of water gradually, working towards the target of 4-6 glasses per day for the time you spend at work.
- Continue to record how many glasses of water you drink at work each day. You can use the record sheets for Weeks 2-4.
- At the end of each day, record how you have been feeling. Have there been any changes in your concentration level, feelings of fatigue, or irritability, for example?
- Think about the reasons why you didn't drink more water. Discuss with your work colleagues ways around these problems.

Week 1	Number of glasses of water I drank during the working day	How I have been feeling today. For example, energy levels, concentration levels or mood
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		
Weekly Average		

Hydration challenge: Record sheet

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Week 2	Number of glasses of water I drank during the working day	How I have been feeling today. For example, energy levels, concentration levels or mood	Reasons for not drinking more water
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			
Sunday			
Weekly Average			

Changes from week 1

How many glasses
more (or less)
did you drink this
week compared
to Week 1?

Hydration challenge: Record sheet

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Week 3	Number of glasses of water I drank during the working day	How I have been feeling today. For example, energy levels, concentration levels or mood	Reasons for not drinking more water	Possible solutions
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				
Weekly Average				

Changes from
week 2

Hydration challenge: Record sheet

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Week 4	Number of glasses of water I drank during the working day	How I have been feeling today. For example, energy levels, concentration levels or mood	Reasons for not drinking more water	Possible solutions
Monday				
Tuesday				
Wednesday				
Thursday				
Friday				
Saturday				
Sunday				
Weekly Average				

Changes from
week 3

FACTORS THAT MIGHT PREVENT YOU FROM DRINKING MORE FLUIDS WHILE AT WORK CAN INCLUDE:

- Poor location of water facilities, making them inaccessible
- Limited opportunities to break for a drink
- Lack of encouragement to stop for a drink of water
- Not wanting to drink too much because of embarrassment over using shared toilet facilities or poorly maintained toilets.