IT'S NOT ALL ABOUT FLUIDS: 5 FACTORS THAT CAN LEAD TO DEHYDRATION

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Takeaway: Lifestyle choices affect how susceptible workers are to dehydration.

You could be forgiven for thinking that the only way to prevent dehydration is to drink fluids. After all, that's about the only thing that comes to most people's minds when they're told to stay hydrated.

But fluid intake is only one part of staying safe in the heat or doing physically demanding work. In this article, we'll look at five other factors that play a role in keeping your body hydrated.

First, Hydrate!

The human body is around 60% water and you can experience symptoms of dehydration if you lose as little as 2% of that. Just imagine how quickly you could sweat that out working in hot or humid conditions.

Dehydration can have a significant impact on your body's functioning and limit your ability to do your job. In fact, poor hydration can lead to:

1. **Lower cardiac output**, meaning the heart doesn't work as well during exercise or medium to heavy work
2. **Reduce blood volume,** which decreases blood pressure and affects your strength and endurance
3. **Decreased ability to cool down** – as the body struggles to hold water in, it sweats less and raises core temperatures

Surprising Factors that Affect Hydration

Everyone's body reacts differently, and two workers could have very different reactions to the same conditions and fluid intake levels.

So, what's going on here?

A lot of these differences come down to things that either happen off the job site or have nothing to do with the job itself. Plenty of things other than the heat and exertion can affect the body's ability to absorb and retain water. It's important to factor these in when trying to figure out the right level of fluid intake to stay safe and hydrated throughout the workday.

Diet and Nutrition

Proper nutrition is important for keeping up your strength and energy levels, but it will also help you stay hydrated.

Before you decide to give a low carb diet a try, consider that carbs like oatmeal and whole grain pasta increase your hydration levels. If you eliminate these from your diet, you will need to compensate with extra fluid intake.

Soda, energy drinks, and salty foods also contribute to dehydration because they absorb fluids meant for the body. If you're working out in the sun or have to wear bulky or heavy equipment, try consuming these only in moderation.

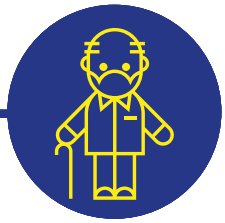
Alcohol

Now, here's one kind of fluid intake that might work against you.

If you've ever had a hangover, you know that the best way to recover is to drink lots of water. Why? Because alcohol is a diuretic and it forces water through your system before it can be absorbed.

And just because you don't drink alcohol on the job or show up to work inebriated doesn't mean you're in the clear. Regularly consuming alcohol makes it harder for your body to absorb liquid and stay hydrated even when you're stone-cold sober.

Age



Even if you're just as strong and spry as your younger co-workers, you might still need to take extra care to prevent dehydration as you get older.

There are two things at play here. First, as you get older, your body starts having a harder time retaining water. So, it might take a few more swigs to get to the same level of hydration.

Second, the older you are, the less likely you are to feel thirsty, even when your body needs fluids. That means dehydration can set in before you even feel parched. If you're an older worker, it's a good idea to track how much liquid you take in instead of relying on cues like thirst.

Altitude

Oxygen levels are lower at higher altitudes. Your body compensates for this by breathing more quickly and deeply.

Not everyone realizes that we're constantly losing some of our body's water content by breathing it out as vapor. As our body works harder to take in oxygen at higher altitudes, we can lose as much as twice the amount of water we normally do.

In addition to changes in our breathing, urine output also tends to increase at higher altitudes. So, the higher you go, the more you need to drink to stay safe.

Medication

Taking medication is one of those small things that can make a big difference to hydration levels. Taking a pill or two every day might not seem like a big deal, but a range of medication from antihistamines to blood pressure meds can lead to dehydration. If you take any of these, you will need to take in more fluids to keep your body balanced.

If you take medication regularly, review your prescription or consult your doctor or pharmacist to find out whether it puts you at added risk of dehydration.

Take a Holistic Approach to Hydration

Dehydration makes the body weaker and it can have some dangerous effects. So don't take chances. Make sure you look beyond liquid intake while working and consider all the factors that might prevent your body from absorbing those fluids.