

Outdoors health tips from the posse

How much water is enough?

BY MARK RACKAY

With the hot weather settling in on us here in Montrose, we see a rise in dehydration and heat exhaustion among people who are taking part in physical activities outdoors. Drinking enough water is only part of the solution. When and how much water to take in is another part.

I have read scores of articles by medical professionals about how much water to drink. One theory is that a normal person should consume a half gallon, 64 ounces, during a normal day. If you are outside in the heat and doing strenuous activity, up to three gallons may be needed. That is 48 glasses of

water folks. I don't care if you are part camel, that's a lot of water to lug around. I drink anywhere near that amount and I will slosh like a kid's wading pool.

If you are outdoors during the cooler part of the day, and your activity level is not excessive, drinking when you are thirsty is probably enough. However, if it is warmer outside, or your activity level is more strenuous, waiting until your thirsty may be too late.

Watch for the signs of dehydration, which include dry lips and tongue, dizziness, light headedness infrequent urination, bright or dark colored urine and a low energy level. Any of these symptoms should be addressed immediately as they will get worse if you don't.

These symptoms could progress to heat exhaustion, bringing on symptoms such as chills, clammy skin, muscle pains or spasms, and nausea. If you develop any of these symptoms, move to a cool place, remove excess clothing and consume cool fluids. If no improvement is seen, seek immediate medi-



(Submitted photo/Mark Rackay)

cal attention.

Fluid levels in your body are based on body weight and physical activity levels. If you experience a very quick weight loss, it is due to loss of body water. A pound of lost weight is equal to about two cups of lost fluids.

A good indicator of proper body hydration is the color of your urine. An odorless, pale yellow urine color, similar to the color of lemonade, indicates you are well hydrated. A darker yellow or orange color, similar to the color of apple juice, indicates you need to drink more. Some vitamin supplements may temporarily give your urine a bright yellow color.

When your outdoor activity is of a longer duration, such as long hikes or backpacking, plain water is not going to cut it. You are going to need to take in some sodium and electrolytes, like in a sports drink.

Sodium helps your body regulate how much water a cell can hold. When your body's sodium level drops to critically low levels, your cells take on too much water and swell. In extreme cases, this can lead to

cerebral and pulmonary edema (swelling around the brain and heart).

When you drink, fluids pass through your stomach and small intestines before being absorbed into your bloodstream.

A review of studies on gastric emptying, published in NUTRITION REVIEW, found that when people consumed 20 ounces of fluid at a time, the fluid moved faster through their stomach than when they ingested 13.5 ounces. And 13.5 ounces moved faster than 7 ounces.

What does that mean? It is smarter to take a few long pulls off your water bottle than to take tiny sips every 10 minutes. If you plan on drinking 16 ounces of water an hour, it is better to drink 8 ounces every half hour rather than to sip throughout the hour.

If your activity will last more than an hour, you are going to need to bring some carbohydrates into your body. Most of the sport drinks such as Gatorade and Powerade have a pretty good balance of carbohydrates and electrolytes. They do contain a fair amount of sugar but that can also help fuel your body.

You can make your own sports drinks quite easily at home if you are so inclined. Blend cold watermelon juice, water, ice and a dash of salt. You can dilute just about any juice to a one-to-one ratio (one part water and one part juice) and it will get you to an average of 7 percent carbohydrate blend, which is perfect for your activities.

We waited a long time for summer to hit the Rockies. Enjoy the outdoors but make sure to keep yourself properly hydrated. Until next time, see you on the trail.

Mark Rackay is a freelance writer who serves as a director and spokesman for the Montrose County Sheriff's Posse. For information about the posse call 970-252-4033 (leave a message) or email info@mcspi.org •

Sunburn and skin cancer

Sunburn can be a painful, unsightly consequence of too much unprotected time spent in the sun. But sunburn is more than just a temporary nuisance. According to the Skin Cancer Foundation, sunburn can cause long-lasting damage to the skin and increase a person's risk of developing skin cancer.

Sunburn tends to be so common, particularly during the warmer months of the year, that many people may consider it a relatively harmless byproduct of spending time outside under the sun. But the United Kingdom-based charitable organization Cancer Research UK notes that getting painful sunburn just once every two years can triple a person's risk of developing melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer. A better understanding of sunburn and its relationship with skin cancer may encourage more people to prioritize protecting their skin when spending time in the sun.

What is sunburn?

Sunburn occurs when the DNA in skin cells has been damaged by UV radiation. Many people associate sunburn with skin that peels or blisters, but any skin that turns pink or red in the sun has been sunburnt.

Am I always vulnerable to sunburn?

Though many people may only get sunburns on hot days, that's not because the skin is not susceptible to sunburn year-round. In fact, sunburn can occur any time of year because it's caused by ultraviolet radiation, which has nothing to do with the temperature. Many people only spend time outdoors on hot days; hence, the reason they may only suffer sunburn in late spring and summer. Since sunburn can occur at any time of year, it's imperative that skin is covered up and sunscreen is applied regardless of what time of year a person is enjoying the great outdoors.

Am I out of the woods once my skin peels?

People who have experienced sunburn may have noticed their skin peeling in the days after they were burned, though not every sunburn victim's skin peels. Peeling is how the body rids itself of the damaged cells that can lead to cancer. But just because a sunburn victim's skin peels post-sunburn

does not mean that person has necessarily dodged the skin cancer bullet. Some damage may remain after skin peels, and that remaining damage can still make sunburn sufferers vulnerable to skin cancer.

I've been sunburned. Now what?

A sunburn, even a particularly bad sunburn, does not guarantee a person will develop skin cancer. But frequent sunburns increase a person's risk of the disease, so people who have been sunburned, whether it's just once or several times, should revisit what they're doing to protect their skin before going back out in the sun. Wearing protective clothing, including long sleeve shirts and protective hats, and applying strong sunscreen with a minimum sun protection factor, or SPF, of 30 are just a couple of ways to protect skin from sun damage.

More information about sunburn and skin cancer prevention is available at www.skincancer.org.

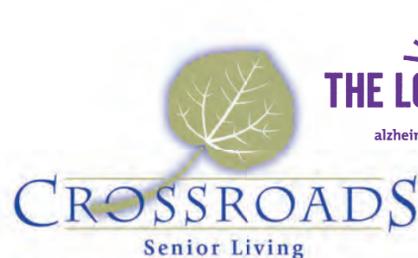
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