



# Food For Thought

When we consider nutrition for optimal learning, one important place to start is with something we frequently pay little attention to and that is **WATER**.

Water makes up at least 80% of the brain and is an essential element in neurological transmissions. Poor hydration adversely affects a child's mental performance and learning ability. Symptoms of mild dehydration may include tiredness, headaches and a feeling not unlike jet lag, as well as reduced alertness and ability to concentrate. Mental performance including memory, attention and concentration decreases by the time a child feels thirsty. Mental performance deteriorates progressively as the degree of dehydration increases.

## **What is dehydration?**

Dehydration is simply not having enough water in your body. It may result from inadequate water intake and/or from losing body water and can develop rapidly or slowly.

## **How can you tell if children are dehydrated?**

A lot of people don't even realize they are dehydrated because they are so used to that condition they don't know how well they would feel if their body had enough water.

Watch for the symptoms we already mentioned which are tiredness, inability to concentrate, short attention span, inability to listen, headaches. We may think that children that are lethargic and just slump in front of the TV when they come home from school are just tired, but it should be considered ABNORMAL.

The easiest physical way to determine dehydration is to be aware of what your child's urine is like. They are dehydrated if it is concentrated so that there is a small amount and it is cloudy and smells. Urine should be no darker than a pale straw color and odorless. Children should be taught what their urine should look like as a health habit just like they learn how to brush their teeth, so they will learn to understand that they need water.

## **How much water?**

For adults, we usually use the rule of taking your weight and dividing it by 2 for the number of ounces to drink in a day. So a 128 lb person needs about 64 oz or the 8 glasses each day that we often hear as the recommended amount. Children under 8 need less water than adults, but they need it very regularly for optimum health. You can't make up for poor hydration by having them drink a lot of water at one time.

## How can I make sure my children drink enough water?

Establish the habit of having children drink water as soon as they get up in the morning. Then serve them a glass of water at each meal and midmorning, midafternoon, and midevening. They are unlikely to drink a whole glass of water each time, but they will receive hydration at regular intervals. Of course they need more when it is very warm (or very cold by the way!) and when they are doing more physical activity. And watch the urine test to see how it looks compared to the water they are consuming. . In preschools and daycares, it is required that the children have access to water at all time. When they go to elementary school, train your children to take drinks at the water fountains whenever they have the opportunity. The key to boosting the capacity to learn is to keep well hydrated throughout each day.

## Can other liquids-juice, milk, sports drink, pop count as their water intake?

These items certainly contribute to hydration, but they should not substitute for water. We will look at each of them in the next newsletter.



### **Homework:**

Watch your child's water intake and urine color this week and see where you need to start new habits to ensure your child has adequate water. **It is one of the simplest and most inexpensive things you can do to help them be at their best for learning.**