When we talk about taking care of our bodies, we generally think about eating more fruits and vegetables, cutting back on fried and salty foods, and being active. There is, however, one major thing that we often forget about and is critical to our health - water. As many of you already know, the body is made up of about 60% water and every “system” in our body needs water to function. As an example, a person that is 150 pounds is made up of about 11 gallons of water! Here are just a few important functions of water:

► in our blood, water “feeds” our working muscles with glucose (sugar the fuels the muscle), oxygen, and fats; it also carries lactic acid and carbon dioxide out of muscles.
► water regulates our body temperature by sweating; when you are exercising, for example, water absorbs the heat from your muscles and dissipates it through sweat to lower your body temperature.
► water in saliva mixes with the enzymes we produce to digest the foods we eat.
► water in the urine gets rid of waste products the body doesn’t need anymore.

How much fluid does the body need each day?
This seems like it should be an easy question to answer, but it is not. Each person is different and fluid needs will depend on how active you are, where you live, and your overall health. The general recommendation has always been to drink about eight glasses of water a day for everyone. Here is what experts at the Institute of Medicine recommend:

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<th>MEN</th>
<th>WOMEN</th>
<th>PREGNANCY</th>
<th>BREASTFEEDING</th>
<th>ATHLETES</th>
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| General Fluid Needs | 13 cups/day | 9 cups/day | 10 cups/day | 13 cups/day | *2 cups an hour before exercise *
|          |        |        |           |               | *4-8 oz per 15 minutes of activity* |
|          |        |        |           |               | *2 cups after exercise            |

Some foods we eat can help keep us hydrated such as watermelon (appropriately named since 90% of it is water), spinach, celery, cucumbers, tomatoes, green peppers, yogurt and soup. Sports drinks are recommended if you have intense activity such as running or football/soccer practice for an hour or more; otherwise rehydrating with water is fine and the electrolytes can easily be restored by eating a balanced diet.

We used to believe that drinking anything with caffeine did not hydrate the body, but research has proven this wrong. Caffeine in moderate amounts, like a 12 ounce coffee or about 200 mg of caffeine, does not generally increase urine output more than the amount of fluid consumed. Alcohol should be avoided after exercise or in high temperatures as it does increase urine output and it can impair your ability to recognize the symptoms of dehydration. In most cases, water is the best drink to get the body hydrated.

How do you know if you are getting enough fluid?
One of the best ways to check your hydration status is by looking at the color of your urine (unless you are taking supplements that can change the color of urine). The darker the color of your urine typically the less hydrated you are. If your urine is light-colored and you have good urine output every 2-4 hours chances are you are drinking enough fluid.

Another measure of hydration is to weigh yourself before and after exercising hard for an hour or more. For each pound of weight you lost during exercise you will need to drink two cups of fluid. This method isn’t as accurate if you ate pizza, Chinese food or some other high sodium food the night before; it also isn’t as accurate for women that are retaining fluid due to menstruation.

Thirst is not a good measure of your hydration. Signs of dehydration are dry mouth, headache, dizziness, muscle cramps, confusion, feeling tired and lethargic. The elderly have a higher risk for dehydration because they don’t feel or recognize thirst as well. Dehydration can be serious if not corrected right away, and can even lead to death. Be mindful of how much and how often you are drinking fluids during activity and/or high temperatures – at work or at play.