

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

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## “Eight Glasses of Daily Water is Mythology”

Everywhere, people are carrying bottles of water and taking frequent sips from them. Despite the seemingly admonition to “drink at least eight 8-oz glasses of water a day” (with a reminder that beverages containing caffeine and alcohol do not count), rigorous proof for this is missing. You don’t have to consume all the water you need through drinks. Americans get nearly 20% of their fluid intake from food. A 2002 study failed to find any scientific studies to support the eight, eight-ounce glasses (8 x 8) on a daily basis. Surveys of food and fluid intake on thousands of adults of both genders strongly suggest that such large amounts are not needed because the surveyed persons were not overtly ill. This conclusion is supported by published studies showing that caffeinated drinks (and, to a lesser extent, mild alcoholic beverages like beer in moderation) may be counted toward the daily total. However, large intakes of fluid, equal to and greater than  $8 \times 8$ , are advisable for the treatment or prevention of some diseases and certainly are called for under special circumstances, such as vigorous work and exercise, especially in hot climates. The arguments for a high water intake in the lay press go something like this: our bodies consist mostly of water (50–70% of body weight; ~42 liters) and our blood, muscles, brain, and bone are made up mainly of water (~85%, 80%, 75%, and 25%, respectively). Therefore, 1) we need water to function and survive and 2) we need at least eight 8-ounce glasses of water each day. In a 10-year study involving nearly 48,000 men, Michaud and coworkers found that the incidence of cancer of the urinary bladder was reduced significantly by a high fluid intake. A similar correlation has been reported for colorectal cancer and premalignant adenomatous polyps. Chan and associates found, at a 6-year follow-up point, that women who drank five or more glasses of water per day (1,185 ml or more) reduced their risk of fatal coronary heart disease by ~41% compared with women who drank two glasses or less (474 ml or less). The comparable figure in men was 54% less risk. As to prevention of other diseases, conditions of the urinary system, such as urinary tract infections and urinary stones, come to mind.

In the America that I love, there is no scientific evidence to support the claim that the average human needs to drink 8 glasses (i.e., 8-oz cups) of water each day. Also, drinking a lot of water doesn’t necessarily provide the benefits that many sources claim. In fact, drinking too much water can be a problem. Good advice is to drink according to thirst rather than a rigorous schedule.

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