Drink to Your Health

It seems every store these days is stocked with beverages labeled as healthy, natural, or organic, with each claiming to be better for you than the next. Unfortunately, many drink manufacturers use healthy buzzwords while selling you beverages loaded with sugar and calories, and very little of the nutritious stuff. Beyond the hype, though, there are some beverages that not only supply your daily hydration needs but also provide health benefits.

Drinking plenty of water is the simplest – and most calorie-effective – way to keep your body functioning. Water hydrates, improves digestion, reduces headaches, and much, much more. But let's face it, water isn't the most exciting or flavorful beverage, especially if you're looking for variety. Moreover, it doesn't have any direct nutritional value, rather acting to support other bodily functions.

The good news is there are ways to meet your daily fluid needs, avoid the unnecessary calories – and get some extra health benefits while enjoying some variety and flavor.

• **Vitamin Drinks:** Mass-market vitamin drinks, sold under various names, offer both taste and health benefits. They're fortified with varying mixes of vitamins and minerals, such as Vitamin A, Vitamin C, Taurine, Calcium, and Lutein, and have just a fraction of the calories found in other bottled sweet beverages. Many vitamin drinks also come in low- or zero-calorie options, providing the added health benefits without the extra sugar.

• **Coconut Water:** Not to be confused with coconut milk, which is made from the coconut's white meat, coconut water is the liquid found inside young coconuts. It's fat-free, cholesterol-free, low-calorie, super-hydrating, and rich in electrolytes. Its biggest benefit is its high potassium content – almost twice that of a banana. Potassium helps regulate blood pressure and can help prevent related issues like stroke, heart attack, and dehydration. But hardcore athletes beware: coconut water is also very low on sodium, and after a strenuous workout, the body actually needs lots of sodium to replenish what's been sweat out.

• **Tea Time:** All teas are rich in antioxidants, containing more than many fruits and vegetables. Antioxidants help to detoxify harmful compounds in your body that lead to cellular damage, which is associated with chronic health problems such as diabetes, dementia, even cancer. Tea can also strengthen the body's immune system, reduce the buildup of plaque in arteries, and even prevent diabetes. To avoid the calories, drink it plain or use a low-calorie sweetener. Many teas do contain caffeine, which you should limit to 400 mg a day.

• **Java Jives:** Coffee often gets a bad rap because of its addictive caffeine content. But it actually contains even more antioxidants than green or black teas and other beverages such as fruit and vegetable juices. In addition, coffee has other "bioactive" compounds that play an important role in preventing metabolic disease and cardiovascular health problems. Research indicates coffee can help lower the risk of type 2 diabetes, thanks to minerals and acids that help regulate insulin and glucose levels. Like with tea, avoid adding sugar or creamers, and limit your daily servings.

• **Got Milk?:** We already know milk maintains strong bones and teeth, but it has lots more health benefits for adults. Some studies have shown that milk actually aids in weight loss through a combination of its calcium and vitamin D. If you exercise regularly, milk's combination of carbohydrates and high-quality protein make it very effective in helping the body recover from endurance training. Stick with 1% and skim milk for reduced calories and fat. For a dairy alternative, fortified soymilk provides many of the same benefits.

How does your beverage intake fit into your overall diet?

You can talk to the LiveLifeWell Registered Dietitian for free, confidential, one-on-one advice about your nutrition needs. She'll work with you to make sure healthy beverages are part of your plan for better health. Call **(847) 937-5001** or visit **iLiveLifeWell.com**, and schedule an appointment today!

Healthy Beverages Guidelines

- ☐ Drink 7-10 cups (about 60-80 oz) of fluids per day
- ☐ Limit your daily calorie intake from fluids:
  - ✓ For a 2,200-calorie diet: consume a maximum of 200-300 liquid calories
  - ✓ For diets less than 2,200 calories: consume 200 or fewer liquid calories
- ☐ Avoid sports drinks unless you're an endurance athlete with workouts lasting more than 90 minutes
- ☐ Drink 1% or skim milk (over whole or 2%)
- ☐ Make home-brewed coffee and tea whenever you can (bottled varieties are often stripped of their natural health benefits)