



Liquid assets

Summer in the UAE brings soaring temperatures and a retreat into an air-conditioned lifestyle. Lauren Hills talks to Dubai-based nutritionists to discuss the importance of staying hydrated in the heat.

The high temperatures of a UAE summer raises our body temperature dramatically, increases our need for water and often leaves us feeling lethargic and lacking concentration.

Adding to the heat outside, the air-conditioning that we live and work in is hugely dehydrating. While we will often look to a bottle of water as the only answer to the dehydration and thirst, food is also a very important way to add water to our bodies.

"Sometimes water is just not enough. People don't realise it, but one of the best ways to hydrate is through food. Short grain brown rice, for example, is one of the most hydrating things you can eat. The grains swell up with water and by eating that, you are getting the water inside the food so it is easier for the body to absorb it. Glugging down a whole lot of water can sometimes just pass through you," says Miranda Engstrom, a holistic nutritionist living and working in Dubai.

According to Engstrom, you can get up to 20% of the water that you need through food by simply

adding plump and juicy fresh fruit and vegetables to your diet and eating foods that are prepared with water, for example brown rice, cous cous and congee. "One of the key things for hydration is looking at the water within your diet, not just the water you are drinking. Fruit and vegetables contain a lot of water, in particular cucumbers (which are also quite diuretic), water melon, courgettes and lettuce," continues Engstrom.

Many people living in the UAE are not aware that they are dehydrated and just put the stress, lack of energy or even irritable moods down to a busy lifestyle and 'too much on their plate'. "Many people don't realise that they are not getting enough water in their diet and they don't realise how good they can feel if they are properly hydrated. I just tell my clients; increase your water content and see how good you feel," Carole Holditch, the nutritionist at the Good Habits healthy eating and weight control centre.

Typical signs of dehydration that are commonly experienced are dry, dull-looking skin; lifeless, brittle hair; lack of energy; constant thirst and frequent headaches. Both Engstrom and Holditch explain that these are tell-tale signs of dehydration, emphasising that it is up to the individual to gauge if more water, in both food and drink, is needed to be added to their diet.

"There is no hard and fast rule about how much water you should be drinking. If you look at statistics, some people say eight glasses of water a day, some people will say one-and-a-half to two litres of water a day, but different people, different ages, different genders will need different amounts of water," says Holditch, who continues that "you need to judge how much pure water you need to drink by how hydrated you are feeling, because you might be eating a lot of food that has a high water content."

With many expatriates in the region coming from much colder climates, it is often difficult to acclimatise to the heat and humidity, and correct hydration is key to ensuring a happy and healthy lifestyle. "So many people that live here are not from a hot climate and are not used to the dehydrating properties of the heat, and not only that, but the dehydrating properties of air-conditioning too. People need to pay attention to what they're eating and drinking in order to keep hydrated in this region, especially by adding the hydrating foods into their diets; that is such a key thing," says Engstrom.

The Middle East is rich in hydrating foods such as cous cous and congee, as well as fresh leafy salad starters, and many cafes will serve particularly hydrating juices. "All these types of foods and juices are readily available in the UAE because of the heat here. If you go to any cafe you can get watermelon juice or lemon and mint juice. Sometimes these will have sugar added, but you can ask for sugar or syrup to be left out," Engstrom continues.

Another food that is particularly suited to this region is sprouting beans, which are very

Fruit smoothies are a hydrating start to the day



Add courgettes to any meal to boost the water content



Cous cous, feta, tomato and aubergine salad



high in protein and extremely hydrating. The warm climate is particularly good for sprouting, as you can leave mung beans or chickpeas overnight and by the morning it will have sprouted into a fresh and delicious addition to any salad or main meal.

Similarly with nuts and seeds – which are full of nutrients but are not hydrating –soaking them in water overnight will result in a tasty and hydrating snack the next day. “This is a very good tip; you can soak almonds overnight and they become really delicious. You are bringing the enzymes back to life; the almonds will swell up, hold water and give you hydration,” says Engstrom.

While food is the unsung source of hydration, it is of course pure water that plays a pivotal role in keeping us cool and hydrated. While many people will reach for a tall icy glass of water

when thirsty, the better option is to moderate the water intake and sip room-temperature water throughout the day.

“You need to make a good habit of regular water intake. The number one tip is to go everywhere with your bottle of water. If you are sitting at your computer, it needs to be there, if you are in the kitchen then you should make sure a glass of water is there. You need to make it really easy for yourself; really accessible,” says Holditch.

A hydration-friendly diet is key to feeling at your peak; by ensuring the right amount of water in your body you are allowing your body to function at its optimum. Holditch puts it simply that to feel hydrated is “to feel better, look better and be better. Keeping hydrated is a good habit for life.”

Signs of dehydration:

- Dry, flaky skin
- Brittle hair
- Dry mouth
- Lack of energy
- Lack of concentration
- Constant headaches

Top hydrating foods to add to your diet:

- Short grain brown rice
- Fresh green vegetables
- Watermelon
- Cucumber
- Cous cous
- Mung bean sprouts

**Hydrating recipe idea
Courgette and mint soup**

A recipe from Carole Holditch's *The Good Habits Cookery Book*

SERVES 6 (serve hot or cold)

- 2 medium onions, peeled and chopped**
- 1 kg courgettes, cut into chunks**
- 1200 ml chicken stock**
- 2 handfuls of mint leaves**
- Salt and freshly ground pepper**
- Spray oil**

- 1 Spray fat in pan and sweat chopped onions over a gentle heat for a few minutes until softened.
- 2 Add the chopped courgettes and cook for another 5 minutes
- 3 Pour in the chicken stock and add one handful of mint leaves.
- 4 Cover the pan and simmer for 30 minutes.
- 5 Cool, then puree with the remaining handful of mint leaves.
- 6 Taste and season.

