



Hydration and Water Intake

Staying Safe Through Proper Hydration

Every system in your body depends on water. Dehydration impairs judgment, coordination, and physical performance. In a physically demanding work environment, proper hydration is a daily safety practice, not just a personal health choice.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Minimum Daily Intake	Eight 8-ounce glasses of water per day for all employees. Increase in heat or high activity.
Do Not Wait	Thirst is a late sign of dehydration. Drink regularly throughout your shift, not just when you feel thirsty.
Know the Signs	Dry mouth, muscle cramps, nausea, lightheadedness when standing, and sweating that stops.
Risk Factors	Hot environments, physical activity, illness, and certain health conditions all increase water needs.

WHY HYDRATION IS A SAFETY ISSUE

Every system in the body depends on water: digestion, circulation, temperature regulation, and cognition. The average adult loses about 2.5 liters of water per day through urine, breathing, sweating, and digestion. Even mild dehydration (1-2% body weight lost as fluid) impairs concentration, reaction time, and physical strength. Severe dehydration can cause muscle cramping, fainting, heat stroke, and organ failure.

HOW MUCH TO DRINK

- A minimum of eight 8-ounce glasses of water per day under normal conditions.
- Increase water intake during hot weather or in high-temperature work areas.
- Increase during physically demanding tasks that cause significant sweating.
- Increase if you are feeling unwell, especially with fever, vomiting, or diarrhea.
- Pregnant or nursing employees have significantly higher daily water requirements.



SIGNS OF DEHYDRATION

Early	Dry or sticky mouth, decreased urine output, dark yellow urine
Moderate	Headache, muscle cramps, lightheadedness when standing up
Severe	Nausea, vomiting, rapid heartbeat, confusion, cessation of sweating

If you stop sweating during physical work in a hot environment, stop immediately and hydrate. Report any signs of heat illness to your supervisor right away.

PREVENTION HABITS

- Keep a filled water bottle at your workstation at all times.
- Sip water consistently throughout your shift, not just during breaks.
- Drink a glass of water before and after every scheduled break.
- Avoid excessive caffeine or high-sugar beverages during your shift, as they can contribute to dehydration.
- Check your urine color: pale yellow is well-hydrated; dark yellow means drink more water.
- Watch out for signs of dehydration in your coworkers as well as yourself.

Drink before you are thirsty. By the time you feel thirsty, you are already dehydrated.

DAILY HYDRATION CHECKLIST

Build these habits into every shift.

- ☐ Water bottle filled and at workstation at start of shift
- ☐ Drinking water regularly, not waiting until thirsty
- ☐ Increasing water intake during hot or high-activity periods
- ☐ Watching for dehydration signs in myself and coworkers
- ☐ Taking water during every scheduled break
- ☐ Reporting any symptoms of dehydration or heat illness to supervisor
- ☐ Avoiding excessive caffeine or sugary drinks during shift
- ☐ Checking urine color as a simple daily hydration check



This document is part of the Meat Institute Worker Safety Series, supporting Reporting Metric A4: Supervisors lead safety huddles and toolbox chats regularly with hourly workers.

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