

The stressful buzz of the holidays is now slowly disappearing, and you have finally had time to focus on your New Year's resolutions. I hope you have added "Drink more water every day" to your list.

The phrase "water of life" provides us with thoughts of spiritual reflection, as well as reminders of a healthy lifestyle. However, the age-old description of water as "life-giving" just may have more implications for health than you had previously thought.

A study based on data from the Adventist Health Study examined water intake and its relationship to the incidence of heart attack. Researchers at Loma Linda University found that drinking water greatly reduces your risk of fatal heart attack. The results of this study were published in the *American Journal of Epidemiology* (vol. 155, no. 9).



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We all know that approximately 60 percent of our body weight consists of water, and that our body cells must have water to function appropriately. But, more specifically, how does water help to prevent fatal heart attacks?

Dr. Jacky Chan and Synnove Knutsen, along with other LLU researchers, found that the clearest and most consistent association with death from a heart attack was found with water intake,

Men and women drinking five or more glasses of water a day had a decreased risk of experiencing a fatal heart attack when compared to those drinking only two or fewer glasses of water a day.

Research has demonstrated four blood components having a positive relationship with heart disease:

- 1) the thickness of whole blood
- 2) the thickness of the clear component of blood
- 3) the percentage of blood composed of red blood cells
- 4) the level of the proteins in the blood, which are essential for the blood clotting process.

Some studies have even demonstrated that the strength of the relationship for these blood characteristics with heart disease is equal to smoking, high blood pressure, and elevated levels of low density blood cholesterol.

"Not drinking enough water can be as harmful to your heart as smoking," warns Chan.

All of these four blood components can be elevated by dehydration. These changes can even occur with a state of long-term mild dehydration. This is a much more common condition than what is commonly thought of as dehydration resulting from increased sweating, exercise and/or hot weather. Not drinking adequate amounts of water on a daily basis can result in these changes.

But what about drinking fluids other than water? The result of the study showed that the risk for a fatal heart attack actually increased with a higher intake of fluids other than water. Caffeinated beverages and high energy drinks (such as juices and regular sodas) can raise the thickness of the blood, increasing the risk of heart attack. Drinks containing high concentrations of sugar—including fruit juices, can also raise triglyceride levels in the blood. Both of these processes can increase the risk of blood vessel problems and heart disease.

A good rule of thumb is to drink eight glasses of water each day. Set an alarm to remind you when it's time to get some more water. You can also get in the habit of carrying around a water bottle with you during your day.

Adequate water intake is life giving, and that's definitely a New Year's resolution worth keeping!

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