

The Dog Days of Summer



The dog days of summer are upon us. You know them, the dog days or dog days of summer are the hot, sultry, humid days of late summer. “**DOG DAYS**,” I, as many others, always thought the name came from those summer days so devastatingly hot that even dogs would lie around on the asphalt, panting.

Many people, even today, still use the phrase to mean something like that – but originally, the phrase had nothing to do with dogs, or even with the lazy days of summer. Instead, it turns out, the dog days refer to the dog star, Sirius, and its position in the heavens.

To the Greeks and Romans, the “dog days” occurred around the day when Sirius appeared to rise just before the sun, in late July. They referred to these days as the hottest time of the year, a period that could bring fever, or even catastrophe. They were historically the period following the heliacal rising of the star system Sirius, which Greek and Roman astrology connected with heat, drought, sudden thunderstorms, lethargy, fever, mad dogs, and bad luck.

“If you go back even as far as Homer, *The Iliad*, it’s referring to Sirius as Orion’s dog rising, and it describes the star as being associated with war and disaster,” said Jay B. Holberg, author of *Sirius: Brightest Diamond in the Night Sky*. “All throughout Greek and Roman literature, you found these things.” The phrase “dog days” was translated from Latin to English about 500 years ago. Since then, it has taken on new meanings.

“Now people come up with other explanations for why they’re called the ‘dog days’ of

summer, [like] this is when dogs can go crazy,” said Anne Curzan, an English professor at the University of Michigan.

“This is a very human tendency,” she said. When we don’t know the origin of a phrase, we come up with a plausible explanation. “The meaning has been lost,” said Holberg, “but the phrase has lived on.”

The Hottest Days?

So, did the Greeks get it right? Are the dog days, around when Sirius rises, really the hottest days of the year?

Well, no. Although July and August are generally known as the hottest months of the year in the Northern Hemisphere, the hottest period can vary from year to year. And depending on your latitude, the astronomical dog days can come at different times.

Hydration



If it feels like you’ve been waiting all year for summer...well, you have! The sun is finally out, the grass is green, and you’re ready to partake in all those outdoor picnics, beautiful hikes, and perfect pool afternoons that you dreamed about all winter. But as the mercury rises this summer, you’ll need to pay close attention to one important aspect of your health: your hydration.

You see, our bodies are 60% water by weight, and proper hydration is essential for our overall health. After all, the water we consume optimizes blood pressure, regulates body temperature, lubricates joints, moves waste out of the body, and

aids in digestion.

And with increased summer temperatures and outdoor activities comes increased water loss—through sweating and evaporation—as your body works to stay cool.

What If We Don’t Get Enough Water?

Most of us associate dehydration—when more water is moving out of our body than we are taking in—with muscle cramps, fatigue, and extreme thirst. Indeed, these are just some of the consequences of subpar hydration. But, did you know that dehydration affects your brain as well?

Our brain is made up of around 73% water. If we don't keep up with our water intake, especially in hot weather or while exercising, our thinking and cognition can suffer. In one study, adolescents who exercised for 90 minutes to a state of dehydration experienced significant shrinking of brain tissue¹, much like a sponge left out to dry.

In fact, a 2% reduction in body water weight (a mere 3 pounds on a 150-pound person) can lead to problems with short-term memory, attention, and visual-motor tracking². If you plan to use your noggin at all this summer (even if just to read the latest romance novel), keeping it well-lubricated is imperative.

Other signs that you may be dehydrated include loss of appetite, dry mouth, mild constipation, and temporary lightheadedness. A good measurement of your level of hydration is the color of your urine. Pale urine (the color of straw) indicates adequate hydration while darker colored urine is a sign that your body needs more fluids, *pronto*.

Ideas for Happy Hydrating

We know how important hydration is to our health, but the question remains, how do we increase our water intake without feeling water-logged or sprinting to the bathroom every five minutes?

Here are some important tips for staying hydrated (and having fun doing it!) this summer:



1. Make sure you drink enough.

Recommendations vary depending on weight, age, and activity level but an easy one to remember is 8x8, or 8 glasses of 8 ounces of water each day. You can also divide your weight in pounds by 2 and drink that number in ounces. For example, a 130-pound female would need 65 ounces ($135/2$) of water per day. Many experts recommend drinking to thirst—if you are thirsty, drink!

2. Invest in a reusable water bottle. Skip throwaway plastic water bottles that harm the environment—20% end up in landfills—and buy a **BPA-free refillable water bottle** to help you track your water intake each day. If you're

mindful of keeping the bottle nearby, you'll be much more likely to sip throughout the day.

3. Infuse with flavor. Whether you prefer limes, lemons, oranges, berries, or cucumbers, infusing your water with fresh fruit can make for a refreshing and spa-like beverage, without any added artificial sweeteners or preservatives.

4. **Drink before you eat.** We all can relate to that late afternoon “must have a snack” hungry feeling. Before reaching for the nearest source of calories, drink some water! Sometimes our brains confuse thirst with hunger, so next time the feeling strikes, hydrate before eating and your hunger “pains” just might disappear.
5. **Stick with H₂O.** Yes, juices, milk, and herbal teas can all help hydrate your body—even caffeinated drinks (in moderation) can provide you with much-needed water. However, water is what your body is really craving, so you might as well go straight to the source. Sticking with H₂O will help you skip the unnecessary sugars, additives, and caffeine found in other drinks.
6. **Make a water schedule.** If it feels impossible to guzzle down 64 ounces in a single day, you may want to come up with a hydrating schedule. As soon as you wake up, make it a point to drink 10 ounces of water—after a night of fasting, your body will appreciate a morning quencher. Drinking a predetermined number of ounces throughout the day (such as at meals, and before, during, and after a workout) can also keep you on track.
7. **Eat your way to hydration.** The good news is that only 70-80% of your daily hydration needs to come from water; 20-30% should come from food! All whole fruits and vegetables contain some amount of water, but munch on these top picks for maximum benefit:
 - a. 97% water: Cucumbers
 - b. 96% water: Celery
 - c. 95% water: Tomatoes, radishes
 - d. 93% water: Red, yellow, green bell peppers
 - e. 92% water: Cauliflower, watermelon
 - f. 91% water: Spinach, strawberries, broccoli
 - g. 90% water: Grapefruit
8. **Pre-hydrate with soaked chia seeds.** An ancient superfood that sustained the Aztec and Mayan peoples for generations, chia seeds are hydrating nutrient powerhouses. These tiny seeds are *hydrophilic*, meaning they absorb water (up to 12 times their weight!). When you consume water-logged chia seeds before exercise or a day in the sun, they will slowly release that water as your body digests them, keeping your system hydrated. Plus, they are a great source of Omega-3s and many other nutrients. Think of them as mini time-released water bottles!
9. **Go for the coconut.** Water that is. Coconut water is a mineral-rich liquid from the inside of young, green coconuts. Packed with potassium, magnesium, sodium, and calcium, coconut water can replenish lost fluids and electrolytes from exercise and hot summer temperatures. Try freezing coconut water ice cubes or pops for a refreshing, hydrating summer treat.
10. **Take your probiotics.** It’s true—maintaining good gut health helps keep you hydrated. Not only do beneficial bacteria help you **absorb nutrients** and electrolytes from food and drinks (which supports efficient hydration), but a strong **microbiome** helps keep away

any harmful microbes that can cause temporary intestinal issues, leading to dehydration. And, bonus—**probiotics** support your **skin** hydration, too! Over 100 volunteers with wrinkles and dry skin took a probiotic or placebo for 12 weeks. In addition to increased skin elasticity and wrinkle reduction, at the end of the trial the probiotic group had increased water content in both the face and the hands.

Water is truly the elixir of life. As you experience all the wonderful milestones of summer, remember to drink plenty of water and eat a diet rich in hydrating whole fruits and vegetables to keep you going strong all summer long. Your body (and mind) will thank you!