

Week 5

Water, water every where and plenty of drops to drink

Joe Ferry

OK class, today's fitness lesson is about the importance of drinking plenty of water.

When I embarked on this journey some five weeks ago, I never thought good ol' H₂O could play such an important role in losing fat and getting back into shape. My drink of choice for the last two decades has been Diet Pepsi, 20 ounces of carbonated sweetness wrapped around a jolt of caffeine. A couple of those every day and I was good to go.

It became a habit, an addiction: at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. you would find me next to my fix.

One of the first lessons Fernando Paredes, my personal trainer and owner of Fusion Fitness Studio in Doylestown, taught me was the fallacy the diet soda is an acceptable drink.

"The caffeine stimulates your appetite," he says. "You end up eating more food."

Many people confuse water consumption with fluid consumption, he says. Sodas and coffee are NOT an acceptable substitute.

In fact, you need to consume even MORE water if you're drinking sodas and coffee. Caffeine, one of the main components of most sodas, causes



increased urine production and acts as a dehydrating agent. That's why you can drink sodas all day, and never feel satisfied. The water doesn't stay in the body long enough.

Plus, you may mistakenly think that you've consumed enough "water" by drinking soda.

Fernando has opened my eyes to the joy of drinking water, between six and eight 8-ounces glasses every day.

Nothing can happen with your body - not fat loss, not weight loss, not muscle strength - without proper hydration.

And, as usual, Fernando has the facts to back it up:

- a person could live without food for about a month, but only about a week without water;

- the human brain is composed of 95 percent water, the brain 82 percent, the lungs nearly 90 percent;

- a mere 2 percent drop in body water can trigger fuzzy short-term memory, trouble with basic math, and difficulty focusing on the computer screen or on a printed page;

- mild dehydration is one of the most common causes of daytime fatigue; estimates are that 75 percent of Americans have mild, chronic dehydration.

Obviously, if you're trying to lose weight, water intake is important, says Fernando, not only for proper digestion, but to prevent overeating. The sensation of thirst and hunger are generated simultaneously to indicate the brain's needs. If you're not getting plenty of water, you'll likely eat more to satisfy your body's urge for water. When you feel hungry, try drinking a few glasses of water first. You may not be as hungry as you think.

Oops. I made a mistake last week in the section about "Supersize Me," the documentary by Morgan Spurlock about his experiment of eating nothing but food from McDonald's for 30 days. After gaining 24 pounds in just four weeks, I said it took Spurlock 15 months to lose the weight. Actually, it took him 15 weeks.

But the point is still important: if it took Spurlock, a fitness and nutrition enthusiast that long to lose 24 pounds, imagine how long it will take those of us who have ignored proper nutrition and avoided exercise with a passion for decades to convince our bodies to burn fat and add muscle.

We kicked up my workouts a notch in the last week, adding more resistance and repetitions to each exercise. I've started an aerobic program at home, walking about 30 minutes at a brisk pace two or three times a week.

The scale still shows my weight holding steady, but my clothes are fitting better, a sure sign of progress.



Personal trainer Fernando Paredes watches closely to make sure I'm doing the exercise correctly.