

## Dehydration

Easily one of the most common physical problems re-enactors encounter at events is dehydration. This is something to think about before you put on that wool uniform or heavy 19<sup>th</sup> century dress for a hot weather Civil War weekend.

- Death from heat stroke was very common to soldiers during the Civil War, but not something we want to re-enact. We have something they did not always have: easy access to clean water in the field.
- We lose about two cups of water a day just in breathing, this does not include urination and sweating.
- It doesn't need to be a ninety plus degree-day to become dehydrated. High humidity makes dehydration even more likely since you will sweat more to get the cooling effect your body is trying to obtain. Temperatures in the seventies with a high humidity have the potential to cause heat related deaths.
- If dehydrated, our bodies will try to conserve water instead of excreting it with infrequent, darker color urine as a result.
- Other symptoms of dehydration are headaches, dry mouth, apathy and lack of energy, irritability, and muscle cramps.
- Dehydration can lead to heat exhaustion or heat stroke. These symptoms include fatigue, dizziness, nausea or vomiting, shortness of breath, rapid heart beat, and decreased alertness.

Tips for dehydration prevention:

- Most obvious: **drink plenty of water**. Drinking eight 8ounce glasses (64 ounces) of water daily is a safe amount normally, with more water needed while being active under the heat of the sun during the event. It is a good idea to make sure you are well hydrated well before the weekend event by reminding yourself to drink a few extra glasses of water a day for a few days leading up to the event, and of course keep on taking in extra water during the event. Don't count caffeinated or alcoholic beverages as part of your water intake, since these tend to cause dehydration. A good rule is for each caffeinated beverage you have during the day; drink an extra glass of water. Sodas are not the best choice either, since many are caffeinated and the carbonation gives a fuller feeling, and less desire to drink additional liquids.
- Don't wait to become thirsty to drink water. Thirst is a signal from your body that you are becoming dehydrated, so if you feel thirsty you are already becoming dehydrated.
- Sport drinks work great in replacing the sodium and other electrolytes your body loses through heavy sweating, but they don't replace the amount of water your body needs beyond the actual amount of fluid in the sports drink. Gulping down a tin cup full of Gatorade right before heading out to battle won't make up for not drinking any other liquids since you crawled out of your tent at reveille. And remember coffee or other caffeinated drinks don't count.

If you feel like you are dehydrated and feeling any of the symptoms described above, stop your activity, get something to drink, find some shade, remove some clothes, and wet the surface of your skin. Get out of the heat if possible, like to an air-conditioned car (yes, pretty farby, but so is lying in a hospital hooked to an IV).