Is drinking cold water harmful? [1]

Dear Alice,

The good drinking a lot of water does to your body is, of course, clear now to every one. I drink about 2 liters of water daily, but not cold water. I hear drinking cold water will burn more calories as the body has to warm itself to room temperature when intaking the water into the system. Is that right?

Doesn't drinking 2 liters of cold water harm the stomach, kidneys, or any other parts?

Your always thirsty reader

Answer

Dear always thirsty reader,

If temperature is what's been holding you back, cold foods and beverages aren't known to harm any internal organs, so feel free to enjoy them! Additionally, although drinking cold water has been found to burn slightly more calories than drinking warm water, the difference is so small that it’s not considered significant. That being said, some people may find discomfort in drinking colder beverages if they have trouble swallowing or experience heartburn, but it won't cause harm to the body. Ultimately, it's more critical to drink enough water as the temperature makes minimal difference.

You may be curious as to why drinking cold water burns more calories than drinking warmer water. This is because, when swallowing cold food or water, the body exerts energy to raise its temperature back to 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit, or the average resting body temperature. However, the calories lost by drinking cold water are nowhere near the amount of calories people burn by way of their body's basal metabolic rate (the body processes that maintain organ functioning) and physical activity throughout the day.

There are sometimes other benefits to drinking cold water even though, similar to calorie burning, the positive impact may be minor. For example, during hot weather, the body tends to lose extra fluids. People who work, are physically active, or live in hot areas may want to consider drinking cold water because colder fluids leave the stomach more quickly than warmer ones, which allows
for faster rehydration. Cold beverages in hot weather may also help cool down the body, although this cooling effect may not last long or be very noticeable. Regardless, it’s a matter of preference. People generally enjoy drinking cold beverages more than warm ones, so studies indicate that they’ll likely drink more water, known as drinking ad libitum (or drinking for pleasure), if they have a cold supply.

Similar to the benefits of drinking cold water, the negative effects are also thought to be negligible. As mentioned, drinking cold water doesn’t typically cause any harm or injury. However, if you experience heartburn, chest pain, or trouble swallowing, it’s possible that cold water could contribute to throat irritation. Ultimately, the amount of water you drink is thought to impact hydration and health much more than temperature. If you want to know more about recommended water intake, check out this Q&A Not drinking enough fluids? [2].

It sounds like staying hydrated is a priority for you — keep up the good work!

Alice!
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