Lifewire: Keep track of your acetaminophen dosage

by Ven_Griva

Even though over-the-counter painkillers such as acetaminophen are sold without prescription, you would be mistaken to think that they are completely harmless.

Acetaminophen is a common ingredient in many over-the-counter medicines - from headache relievers to cough and cold remedies to sleep aids. It is also found in combination with many prescription painkillers, such as codeine.

Because it is so readily available, people often fail to realize that they are taking it in dangerous amounts.

"It is easy to lose track of how much combined acetaminophen you're consuming when taking combinations of medicines, particularly for different ailments such as arthritis and a cold," said Dr. William Lee, director of the Clinical Center for Liver Diseases at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center in Dallas.

Excessive accumulation of acetaminophen in a person's system at one time, or over an extended period, can lead to serious liver damage, liver failure or even death. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, about 100 people per year die from accidental acetaminophen poisoning and another 15,000 per year are admitted to hospital emergency rooms.

According to the UT Southwestern Medical Center, the average adult should limit his or her total consumption of acetaminophen to no more than 4,000 milligrams per day, the equivalent of eight extra-strength tables. People with liver problems such as hepatitis, or those who regularly drink alcohol, should limit their acetaminophen consumption to no more than 2,000 mg to 3,000 mg per day.

Lee also warns that alcohol makes acetaminophen more toxic and depletes other substances in our bodies that protect us from liver damage.

WORKOUT DRINK

A recent study indicates that downing a glass of low-fat milk might be a better option after exercise than a sports drink - or even water.

Research from a small study published in the July 2007 issue of the British Journal of Nutrition suggests that low-fat milk can be useful in promoting rehydration after a strenuous workout.

In the study, 11 young, healthy subjects completed four separate trials consisting of exercise that resulted in their losing about 2 percent of their body weight through perspiration.

Afterward, the subjects consumed one of four different beverages: low-fat milk, low-fat milk with sodium chloride (salt), water or a commercially available sports drink. The amount the subjects drank was the equivalent of 150 percent of the fluid volume lost during exercise through perspiration.

The 11 participants were monitored to determine their fluid status over the next four hours. The results showed that milk was more effective at replacing exercise-induced fluid loss than were water or the sports drink.

Milk was also found to be more effective at maintaining hydration in the post-exercise period.

The study authors, Susan M. Shirreffs, Phillip Watson and Ronald J. Maughan of the School of Sport and Exercise Sciences at Loughborough University in Leicestershire, England, hypothesize that the natural electrolytes found in milk are responsible for its ability to restore fluid balance. They also suspect that the dietary protein and fat in milk also play a role in milk's ability to aid in rehydration.

Because dehydration increases cardiovascular strain and reduces exercise capacity, the authors underscore the importance of complete rehydration before subsequent exercise.

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