

Stay Safe — Stay Hydrated

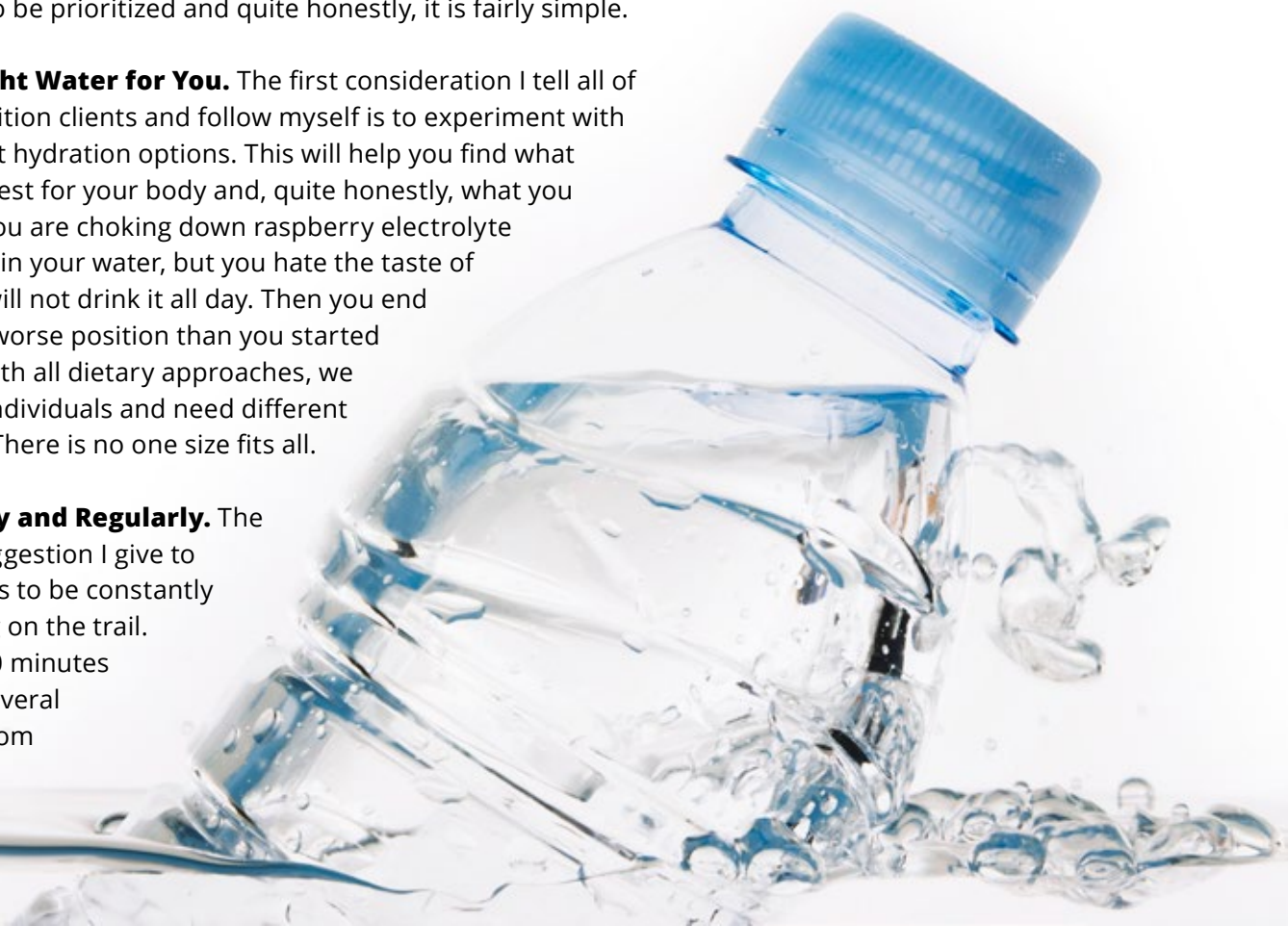
Drinking plenty of water is the number one key to hiking safely. Here are my top tips for staying hydrated out on the trail.

by Nicole Mazziotti

There is nothing I love more than exploring the outdoors. Living in Southern Arizona, I definitely have the opportunity to traverse into canyons, climb mountains and even dip my toes in streams and rivers from time to time. And while I'm always up for a good adventure, it's important to go about it safely. One of the most important factors to consider when exploring is proper hydration, so you don't end up in trouble. It needs to be prioritized and quite honestly, it is fairly simple.

The Right Water for You. The first consideration I tell all of my nutrition clients and follow myself is to experiment with different hydration options. This will help you find what works best for your body and, quite honestly, what you like. If you are choking down raspberry electrolyte powder in your water, but you hate the taste of it, you will not drink it all day. Then you end up in a worse position than you started in. As with all dietary approaches, we are all individuals and need different things. There is no one size fits all.

Steadily and Regularly. The best suggestion I give to people is to be constantly drinking on the trail. Every 10 minutes I take several swigs from



my hydration bladder. By continually drinking, I don't find myself in a pinch, and my body always has water to use. Unlike fat and carbs that can be stored as energy to use later, we cannot "store" large amounts of water for future use. The key to hydration is little and often. Drinking some water on the way to the trailhead and having water in your vehicle when you return are also routines I practice. It's better to have too much than not enough.

Add Electrolytes. Electrolytes are also extremely important. Eating a well-balanced meal (even if it's small) prior to your hike will help you start out solid and minimize having to eat a lot on the trail. Simple

carbs and salty snacks are your friends. Things like jerky, salted nuts and chips or pretzels help keep salt levels optimal, as well. Some people like to have snacks throughout the day, while others consider eating as the last thing on their mind. The key is to find your balance.

There are several easy and suitable options for people to choose from: salt tablets, sticks, powders or chews. I suggest trying the various brands and flavors to experiment. I used SaltSticks routinely for day hikes around home, but after using them to hike Rim to Rim in the Grand Canyon, I have not touched one since. SaltStick Electrolyte Fastchews are one of my personal favorite tablets.

Vitalyte is a great powder that is acceptable for many people and comes in several flavors. Gu Chews or Clif Bloks are another option especially for people that like to snack out there (like me)! They contain some carbs and salt, with some of them adding caffeine as well if that's your thing.

Another newer product I have used is called Tailwinds. It was created and perfected by an ultra runner from Colorado who was frustrated with his fueling issues. The cool thing about Tailwinds is that not only does this powder offer fuel, hydration and electrolytes, but it will also eliminate the notorious energy "bonk." It contains calories and is intended to be the only thing you will need on the trail that day. It is also gentle on the gut in my experience.

I met a guy in the Grand Canyon who has hiked it before and used all sorts of hydration options. This time he used only Tailwinds and swore by it. Again, some people do not want to fool with snacking all day, so this is a great option to try.

My Hydration Checklist.

People always ask me what I use for hydration. Personally, I carry 2-3 liters of plain water, 1-2 liters of coconut water and snacks like dried fruit, chips and Honey Stingers (love them)! Coconut water has been the absolute best





option for me after a lot of experimenting. I usually have some Clif Bloks on hand to add in, depending on the kind of hike I am doing. I also eat a diet high in nutrients the day before and the day of my hike, so I'm fueled well.

Lastly, I always highly suggest carrying a water filter or purifier in your pack in case something happens, and you run out of your stash. You can get a compact filter for under \$100 that is worth its weight in gold.

Listen to your body, go into your hike hydrated and until you have your water needs dialed in, have more than you think you will need. I still pack more water than I need, and I probably always will. I never leave my house with less than 3 liters. I would rather have a slightly heavier pack than be in a scary situation. Be safe out there! ●