

Does a drink of water help children think? A summary of some recent findings

Dr Caroline Edmonds discusses the role of hydration in improving cognition in school children and the negative effects of dehydration.

Abstract

Water is the optimal drink for both adults and children. New guidelines specify how much children should drink during the day. Children are at greater risk of dehydration than adults. While English schools must legally provide drinking water for children, they differ in how they put this legislation into practice. Some schools allow children to have drinking water on their desks, while others restrict access. There are links between the type of access and the hydration state of children. In adults, there are well-established links between dehydration and negative effects on cognitive performance. Recent studies suggest that dehydrated children also perform poorly in cognitive tests. More recent research has found that giving children a drink of water improved their cognitive performance on tests of memory, attention and visual search tasks. These positive effects on cognition are likely to underpin positive effects on academic performance and providing regular access to drinking water in schools would be a cheap and easy way to improve children's school performance. Further research is indicated to confirm the role of hydration in improving cognition in a UK population and to explore the links to academic and behavioural outcomes.

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