

Outback Survival - Water is Vital for Life!

As we approach the hot summer months, it is particularly important to remember to carry plenty of water in our vehicles when travelling.

Should you need a drink though, never ever sip water, always drink at least a cup full and of course if you need more, drink more. This way a useful amount will enter your system, allowing you to stay hydrated and functioning well.

The water in your stomach is always better for you than the water being in your bottle, so you should drink water at a consumption rate of at least one full standard cup (250ml) each time you drink.

Unfortunately some people have died from dehydration with water still in their water bottles.

Why?

Because when they were nearly out of water they started sipping on their supply trying to make it last longer. Whilst this seems logical and understandable, sipping water does not prevent dehydration. When you sip water, it enters your stomach and engages with food digestion, then your kidneys and liver will rob the remaining millilitres, leaving absolutely none for your brain to absorb and function properly. Yes your brain needs water not just blood and oxygen to survive. A lack of water leads to fatigue quicker and your ability to reason and make wise choices and possibly life saving decisions.

A sad but true example of this occurred in December 1998 near Lake Eyre in South Australia. Two tourists became stranded when their vehicle got bogged at Halligan Bay and the woman, Gabriele Grossmueller, aged 28 years of age from Vienna, Austria, made the fateful decision to try and walk back to William Creek for help.



She left the bogged vehicle with a two-litre bottle of water and tried to walk 60kms in above 40 Celsius temperatures. The following day she was found dead as a result of heat exhaustion and exposure at the 25 km mark. Next to her body was a rucksack and the two-litre water bottle, which contained approximately 1.5 litres of water. A search of the rucksack revealed that she had been carrying another five litres of water in a container, and another two litre container containing 80mls of urine. Their vehicle had plenty of drinking water on board and her boyfriend, who had turned back earlier because he felt sick, was still alive.

If you've run out of water or a getting low on supply you can help yourself, just remember to think outside the square.

If you have a piece of canvas, tarp or plastic sheeting, green foliage and a cup you can make a 'Solar Water Still'. Dig a small hole in the ground (1 metre round and about 50cm deep), place as much green foliage as you can find, place a cup or tin in the middle and then cover the hole with canvas or a plastic sheet. Seal the edges with earth and place a stone on the canvas/plastic above where the cup is.

Alternatively if you don't have digging implements or you are in very rocky terrain you can tie some plastic bags around a lot of foliage on tree branches and seal it tight. With either method, after a few hours of sunlight you will have a ½ a cup or more of liquid which is quite safe to drink. While it may have a funny taste, it's better than dying of thirst.

So what can be learnt from this and what should we always remember:

- Never leave your vehicle - a vehicle is far easier to spot than a lone person/s walking
- Always carry plenty of water - more than you think you'll need
- Drink regularly - especially when driving, to help avoid fatigue
- Sipping to conserve water could be the last mistake you make - so please heed this advice wisely

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