

How much WATER did you have today?

We all know how important it is to turn off the tap while we are brushing our teeth and that the average shower uses much less water than the bath. But did you know that what you eat can also affect your water consumption?

People obviously use large amounts of water through drinking, cooking and washing, but even more water is used to produce our food, clothes, paper, appliances and everything else we use every day. From the sandwiches in your lunch-box, to the apple for the teacher and your home computer everything requires water whether it is grown, produced, processed or manufactured.

The total volume of water that is required to grow or make a product is called its water footprint. While the world's population keeps on growing the volume of water we have on Earth stays the same. If we don't want to run out of water we need to become more aware not only of the physical water we use, but also of the water footprint of the things we buy, eat, use and dispose of every day.

WATER FOOTPRINT

So just how much water are you consuming every day? It really depends on your diet. Animal protein has an especially

large water footprint because vast volumes of water are used to grow the feed consumed by the animals that we derive our meat from. This is increasingly important considering that globally meat production increases every year. Even a small reduction in the animal protein we consume can reduce our water footprint without depriving our bodies of nutrition.

Generally, meat, dairy, and processed foods require far more water to produce than fresh fruit, vegetables and whole grains. That beef hamburger you like eating takes 2 400 litres of water to produce. One bag of 200 grams potato chips (crisps) alone has a water footprint of 185 litres. However, even a seemingly harmless bread and cheese sandwich requires lots of water to make, with 690 litres of water needed to produce a half of kilogram of wheat and 2 500 litres of water needed to make a half a kilogram of cheese. Adding a glass of milk requires another 250 litres of water!

According to the Water Footprint Network the average South African has a yearly water footprint of about 930 cubic metres. That is all the water used to make the food, clothing and other water-driven products we consume. If you times that number by the number of people in the country then the water in the yearly water footprint for the entire South African

HOW MUCH WATER IN THAT MEAL?



- To produce one litre of milk requires 1 000 litres of water.
- To grow one kilogram of wheat needs 1 300 litres of water.
- To grow one kilogram of rice needs 3 400 litres of water.
- More than 140 litres of water goes into every cup of coffee.
- It takes 2 500 litres of water to produce 1 big (500 g) chunk of cheese.
- It takes 4 650 litres of water for one steak (300 g).
- The average water footprint for one apple is 70 litres. One glass of apple juice takes about 190 litres of water to make.
- Every slice of bread uses about 40 litres of water.
- One kilogram of chicken meat has a water footprint of 3 900 litres.
- One egg requires 200 litres of water.
- One kilogram of sheep meat has a water footprint of 6 100 litres
- About 50 litres of water is used to produce one orange.
- One kilogram of maize requires 900 litres of water.



Our love of animal protein is driving up water consumption, with every steak requiring 4 650 litres of water.





Left: The water footprint of an average-sized margherita pizza is 1 200 litres.

Right: Fresh vegetables use much less water than processed foods.



population is enough to fill 1 488 000 Olympic-sized swimming pools! This is a large number, however, our water footprint is still less than the global average, which is 1 243 cubic metres per person per year. In the United States of America, where people consume a lot of animal protein, the average yearly water footprint per person is 2 483 cubic metres (the largest on the planet). In Asian countries such as Japan, where people are more dependent on seafood, the water footprint is only 1 153 cubic metres per person per year.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

There are a few things you can do to reduce your water footprint. Firstly, only buy enough food for your own and

The water footprint of a product does not only take into account the water it needs to grow, but also its processing, packaging and transport to market.



FURTHER READING

- Visit www.waterfootprint.org to find out more about the water footprint of different products and to calculate your own water footprint.
- Visit www.h2oconserve.org for quizzes and tips on how to reduce your water footprint.
- Visit: <http://tlc.howstuffworks.com/home/going-green1.htm> for general tips on greener living.

your family's consumption and plan meals accordingly. Tossing out leftover or spoilt food means wasting every drop of water that went into growing that food (think of that every time you don't ask for a doggie bag when eating in a restaurant).

Secondly, eat healthier. Your mother was right when she told you to eat your vegetables. Not only is it better for your body (and your waistline), it is good for the environment too. Meat requires five to ten times more water to produce than vegetables. Even better, grow your own fruit and vegetables. Supermarket produce is machine agitated, power-washed, fan-dried, refrigerated and kept from freezing, all which requires electricity. Water is used to make

electricity, and this adds to the water footprint of the products we consume. Water is also used to make the plastic packaging that we buy our produce in.

We all need to become more conscious about how much water it takes to maintain our lifestyles. So drop that packet of crisps and reach for that orange!

