

Fluids: More than just satisfying your thirst

Fluids are the most neglected part of an athlete's diet. A result of poor attention to the amount of fluid and the kind you intake is less performance. Thirst is your body's signal that you need to drink water, but by the time that you get the thirst sensation you may have already lost 1-2 percent of your body's water. This can definitely hurt performance levels.

Importance During Exercise

During exercise your body produces excess amounts of heat and the most effective way that the body can rid itself of this is through sweating. Fluid lost during exercise through sweating can exceed two quarts or four pounds per hour. This is especially true in humid environments or in events where padding is used. As dehydration progresses, performance levels become impaired.

While in hot and humid environments more liquid intake is required to maintain performance. About two hours before exercise you should drink two cups of water or sports drink. Half an hour before exercise, drink one-cup of water or a sports drink. At this point, stay away from fruit juices since they contain high levels of sugar, which will increase complaints of an upset stomach or cramping. During exercise, $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of water or sports drink can be taken every 20 minutes. Water and sports drinks are best because they can be absorb into your body quickly. Even mild levels of dehydration will directly hamper competitive possibilities.

Immediately after exercise is not only a good time to restore spent fluid, but also a good time to take in some carbohydrates. Either a beverage containing higher levels of carbohydrates, such as a sports drink, or a solid food should be consumed during this period.



Keep Up The Fluid Levels.

Recreational athletes are probably best when served water during exercise bouts, but higher intensity athletes should look at the carbohydrate level in drinks. The optimal carbohydrate drink during exercise should contain only a small amount of salt. When choosing a beverage for exercise bouts, look for one that provides about 15-20 grams of carbohydrate. Be sure to listen to what your body is telling you so that you won't get left behind at the end of the race!

By the time you feel thirsty you have already lost 2% of your body's water and impacted your body's performance