

Fluid Management Fact Sheet
Athletes Fuel Up For Fitness

“I drink when I get thirsty. Isn't that enough?”

Absolutely not! The body is already dehydrated by the time you're thirsty. Most people underestimate the importance of proper hydration and studies show that athletes don't voluntarily replace lost fluids. You are too busy to worry about fluid, right? Don't get caught in that trap. In fact, a mere 2 % loss of weight due to dehydration can hurt performance. The bottom line is that good hydration is essential to all athletes. Make sure you drink plenty of non-caffeinated fluid before, during, and after practice. And please don't forget competition! Remember, for events lasting less than an hour, drink 1-2 cups of water 2 hours before the competition and 4-6 ounces every 15 minutes during.

“I drink at least 20 ounces of coffee during the day, does this count towards my daily fluid requirement?”

Try not to count it. Caffeine can cause diarrhea as well as other symptoms in some athletes. It is a drug and excessive use may deplete calcium stores and cause water loss. If you use caffeine, it is important to eat high calcium foods regularly. If you don't normally drink caffeine-containing fluids, try to avoid them before a workout or competition. Some sports organizations ban its use in large quantities and may even perform a drug test to screen for caffeine before competition.

How much fluid should an athlete drink?

An overall goal is to drink between 80-96 ounces of caffeine-and-alcohol-free fluid per day. The best liquid sources to choose from include water, 100 % fruit juice and milk. Cold water is usually the best choice for the athlete exercising less than 60 minutes because it clears the stomach quickly. If exercising longer than 60 minutes, a diluted fruit juice or sports drink can be useful. Full strength juices and juice drinks are not recommended immediately before and during heavy workouts because they can cause fullness and cramping. Most popular sports drinks have the recommended carbohydrate concentration of 6-8 %. Mixing 1 cup of 100% fruit juice and 1 cup of water will also provide this percentage. Studies show that athletes drink more when fluids are lightly sweetened. **Never experiment in competition**; always try new products during practice.

“How can I tell if I am well-hydrated?”

Here are two ways to check. The first general rule for maintaining fluid balance is to drink at least two cups of fluid for every pound of body weight lost during exercise. If you don't weigh yourself before and after exercise, check the color of your urine. When an athlete is well hydrated, urine will be light yellow or clear. Keep in mind that urine will be bright yellow after taking a multivitamin, this has nothing to do with dehydration. Other signs of dehydration include headaches and fatigue.

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Confused?

Here is an example to help you sort out the above information: An athlete could lose as much as 4 cups (32 ounces) of fluid during an hour of physically exhausting exercise like running. This athlete might weigh 2 pounds lighter afterwards and have darker urine than usual. A good response to this situation would be to drink 8 ounces (1 cup) of 100 % orange juice along with at least 24 ounces (3 cups) of water. This will replace needed fluid and 30 grams of carbohydrates as well. Developing your own sports nutrition program, which includes fluid management, is important. Elite athletes who neglect to eat a healthy diet and drink enough fluid may prevent optimal performance, which could be the difference between a lost opportunity and a winning score.

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