

Proper Hydration Essential to Optimal Athletic Performance

As the summer temperatures rise, there is one essential nutrient all athletes need: water. Water isn't a flashy new supplement but without it, optimal athletic performance is impossible. Water constitutes about 75% of the human body and a 1% reduction of it can affect athletic performance. Dehydration is the main reason athletes' performances suffer in hot and humid environments.

How do you tell if you're dehydrated? There are many signs and symptoms of dehydration but the easiest way is to inspect the colour of your urine. If your urine is an extremely dark yellow and you are urinating infrequently, you're dehydrated. You should drink enough water to maintain light yellow urine colour. Other signs and symptoms include: excessive thirst, headache, fatigue, dizziness and irritability, depression, vomiting, nausea or bladder infections.

Below are some tips to keep you well hydrated this summer:

- Start and end your day with an eight oz. glass of water. This is extremely important for those athletes who live in hot and humid environments and sweat excessively during sleep.
- Carry a water bottle with you during the day which allows you to sip small amounts of water no matter where you go.
- It is recommended that athletes drink 500ml of water approximately 2 hours before exercise.
- During exercise, athletes should imbibe small amounts of water about 250 ml for every 15 minutes of exercise.
- After exercise, athletes should ensure that they drink 500ml-1000ml of water to replace fluid that is lost during exercise.

Recently, there has been an increase in the incidence of athletes suffering from something called exercise induced hyponatremia. This condition is characterized by having low sodium levels in the blood due to excessive salt loss through sweating or drinking too much water. That's right. It is possible for athletes to drink too much water especially during long events such as triathlons or prolonged exercise over 4 hours. The symptoms of over hydration are often similar to dehydration often leading to a misdiagnosis. Ways to prevent hyponatremia include following the above guidelines for proper hydration, eating salty foods prior to the athletic event such as pretzels and drinking an electrolyte replacement drink such as Pedialyte, Gatorade or E-Load during the event.

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