

Drink Up for Sports and Fitness

The best beverages to help you stay hydrated

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WebMD Weight Loss Clinic - Expert Column

Summertime is here, so you've got no more excuses for not going outside to get some physical activity. Outdoor activity is a great way to put the fun into fitness -- but it requires paying special attention to hydration.

When it's warm, your body perspires more to help you cool down. And depending on the temperature, humidity, and the nature of your activity, you might not even realize how much you are perspiring.

Don't rely on thirst alone to tell you how much you need to drink. To keep those muscles working and avoid fatigue; it's extremely important to drink plenty of liquids before, during, and after the activity.

Drink Up -- Before, During and After

A good guideline to use when preparing for an outdoor workout, whether it's walking, running, biking, or tennis, is to drink about two cups of fluid two hours before the activity. That helps make sure you are well-hydrated before you ever go outdoors.

Then, during the activity, try to drink 4-6 ounces every 15-20 minutes to keep your muscles well-hydrated. If you are planning an hour-long walk or gym workout, fill a water bottle with about 16 ounces (2 cups) and take it with you.

Last, drink up after you're finished with your exercise. If you really want to be precise, weigh yourself before you start exercising and again when you are finished. For each pound of water weight you lose, drink 20 ounces of fluid.

Which Liquids Are Best?

For most outdoor activities, good old-fashioned tap water does the trick. If your activity lasts an hour or more, either fruit juice diluted with water or a sports drink will provide carbohydrates for energy plus minerals to replace lost electrolytes (sodium, potassium, magnesium) in your sweat.

Sports drinks like Gatorade, Powerade, and All Sport can give you a needed energy boost during your activity. They are designed to rapidly replace fluids and to increase the sugar (glucose) circulating in your blood.

Read the label to determine which sports drink that is best for you. Ideally, it will provide around 14 grams of carbohydrates, 28 mg of potassium, and 100 mg of sodium per 8-ounce serving. The drink's carbohydrates should come from glucose, sucrose, and/or fructose -- all of which are easily and quickly absorbed. It shouldn't be carbonated, as the bubbles can lead to an upset stomach.

Most sports beverages are well-diluted and contain relatively few calories. If the flavor of a sports drink helps you drink up and maintain hydration, by all means enjoy. If you're worried about the added calories, try diluting your sports drink with water or pouring it into a thermos packed with ice.

What About Fitness and Designer Waters?

"Fitness waters" such as Propel are lightly flavored and have added vitamins and minerals. The additional nutrients are meant to supplement a healthy diet -- not replace losses from exercise.

What About Fitness and Designer Waters? continued...

Fitness waters fall somewhere between the sports drinks and plain water. They contain fewer calories and electrolytes than sports drinks, but offer more taste than plain water. The choice is yours: once again, if drinking these beverages helps you stay hydrated, go for it.

Bottled water has catapulted to the top of the beverage industry, with sales of \$8.3 billion in 2003. One of the fastest-growing segments of that market is designer waters.

These "super-waters" are advertised as being enhanced with everything from vitamins, oxygen and glucose, to alleged fat-burning minerals. Keep in mind that the FDA does not require proof of this kind of claim. So think of these products as designer waters that serve the primary purpose of hydration and little more. Don't be fooled by the claims that some can promote weight loss!

Beyond Hydration

Fluids are vital to help your muscles function throughout your activity -- but so is your blood sugar. You need to eat a light meal or snack of at least 100 calories about an hour or so before your activity. The nutrients from the snack will help you perform better and keep hunger from interfering with your activity.

The best snacks combine healthy carbohydrates, protein, and a small amount of fat. Fruit, yogurt, nuts, and granola bars are all good examples. Read "Recipe Doctor" Elaine Magee's [article on snack bars](#) for more options for fueling your workout.

Further Reading:

- [How can I prevent dehydration?](#)
- [What's the deal with sports drinks?](#)
- [Energy Shots Review: Do They Work? Are They Safe?](#)
- [Energy for Sale](#)
- [Top 10 Drinking Dangers](#)
- [Energy for Sale](#)
- [Meal Replacements: Choose Those Bars and Drinks Carefully](#)
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