

BY HARRY THOMPSON

WATER WORKS

Staying Properly Hydrated Is The Key To Good Athletic Performance



As a performance dietician at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., Luke Corey spends much of his day instilling the importance of good nutrition into his young students.

And no element is more important to an elite athlete's nutritional program than water. Drinking too little water or losing too much through sweating decreases one's ability to train hard and recover properly.

"Taking a proactive approach to hydration and not waiting until you're thirsty and constantly drinking water before, during and after your game can help with a good performance," Corey says.

According to information provided by the U.S. Olympic Committee's Performance Services department, water does more than just keep an athlete hydrated. It also:

- Supplies essential nutrients to working muscles during training
 - Helps the body get rid of the waste products resulting from high-intensity training
 - Helps the body cool itself during exercise by ridding it of heat through sweat
- "Being fully hydrated is like the per-

fect medium for your body to function," Corey says.

"I use the analogy of a car. Imagine you have a high performance car like a Porsche. If you don't put any oil into your engine what's going to happen to it? It's going to seize up and your car will no longer work. Hydration is the same thing. If you're not fully hydrated and your body doesn't have that fluid, things are going to seize up."

Losing even a small amount of fluid during training or starting a workout dehydrated will make it hard to perform at your best, not only physically but mentally as well.

"Our brains are 90 percent water, so even a small amount of dehydration can affect your ability to focus," Corey says.

"For a hockey player, that can be the difference between scoring on that breakaway or connecting on the one-time slap shot where you have to focus on what you're doing instead of being a little bit cloudy and not being able to make a good decision."



SPORTS DRINKS HAVE THEIR PLACE

No matter what your preferred brand of isotonic beverage, there's no denying that sports drinks are a multi-billion dollar business.

But how much of it is marketing hype trying to convince athletes to "Be Like Mike," and how much of it really does a body good after a long, hard workout?

According to studies, the longer and more demanding the physical activity, the greater the benefit from consuming a sports drink because it helps you maintain blood glucose levels, provides fuel for tired muscles and reduces dehydration.

In addition, most sports drinks contain sodium, which helps to stimulate thirst and encourage drinking. Sodium has also an anti-diuretic effect, reducing urine production and helping the body retain more fluid, which will help in recovery after exercise.

But if you're drinking one while sitting on the couch watching TV, all that sugar and carbs are just unnecessary calories.

PULLING THE PLUG ON ENERGY DRINKS

→ What goes up must come down. Nowhere is that more evident than when athletes look for a quick burst of energy by consuming an energy drink such as Red Bull or RockStar.

High doses of caffeine found in jumbo-sized cans of energy drinks can have dangerous side effects, especially for kids, as emergency room visits tied to caffeine-related incidents are steadily on the rise.

And yet you still see youth hockey players sipping energy drinks as they enter the rink for a practice or game.

"Young athletes have bought into this whole energy drink phenomena, but they don't fully under-

stand the ramifications of doing that," says Luke Corey, performance dietician at the Mayo Clinic.

"The thing about energy drinks is that they'll give you energy but that energy is very short and not sustainable. So you get that boost but you also get that crash that follows."

Corey says that athletes who stay properly hydrated would be better off in the long haul than those who seek the quick fix by consuming energy drinks.

"Athletes fail to realize that water alone can give you that same sort of energy boost," he says. "It's not as quick but it's certainly more sustainable."



DRINK UP IN GOOD TIMES AND BAD

→ When things are going well in a game, athletes tend to drink more liberally, but when things are not going so good they tend to not drink while brooding between shifts. Doing so, says sports dietitian and long-time hockey coach Dave Ellis, can minimize players' chances of winning a key puck battle on their next shift.

Athletes need to be reminded by the coaching staff and their parents to keep drinking water before and after they get on the ice.

CHALK IT UP TO CHOCOLATE MILK

→ When it comes to picking the right beverage to help rebuild and refuel tired muscles after exercise, chocolate milk can pack the right punch.

According to several scientific studies, the combination of carbohydrates and protein in low-fat chocolate milk can help to refuel tired muscles.

Compared to plain milk, water or most sports drinks, it has double the carbohydrates and protein, which are key ingredients for replenishing tired muscles. It also packs a nutritional bonus of calcium, and includes just a little sodium and sugar that help recovering athletes retain water and regain energy, especially after a strenuous workout.

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