



SoccerAmerica's Youth Soccer Insider

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Fueling the young athlete: How much water and when to drink it

By Dev K. Mishra, M.D.



Water seems to have gotten a bad rap lately. It used to be perfectly acceptable to drink water during sports events, but nowadays it seems that there is a big push toward flavored waters and so-called "sports drinks."

Human bodies are about 60% water. Drinking water is critical for all human beings to stay healthy, and water overall is probably more important than food for survival. In average conditions an adult human being can go without water for about 3 to 5 days but can survive without food for much longer. The need for water consumption goes up with exercise and also increases with hot or cold climates. Every part of the human body is dependent on water for proper function.

Sports drinks and juices do provide hydration, but water is still generally the healthiest option for exercise lasting less than 60 to 90 minutes because it lacks the calories and additives of the other drinks. Sports drinks* may be more effective for longer duration exercise because they contain electrolytes that are lost with intense sweating.

Research shows that adolescents and teenagers get less water than any other age group. A good portion of an adolescent's "diet" consists of soda and foods containing a large amount of processed sugars, fat or salt, which have little if any nutritional value. Drinking water before a meal can curb the desire to overeat, and by substituting water for empty-calorie soda will literally save hundreds of useless calories in the overweight child or adolescent's diet.

Young athletes face the risk of dehydration and heat related illness if they do not replace the water that is lost through sweat. Many pediatricians recommend that every child should drink half of their total body weight in ounces of water each day. For instance, the average 6-year-old weighing 46 pounds should drink about 3 cups of water or 23 ounces in the course of the day. Sports participation increases the body's need to consume water.

For athletes, one of the keys is to begin hydrating well before your planned exercise or game session. There is yet another formula for hydrating before exercise. The general recommendation is for young athletes to begin hydrating themselves about two hours before exercise by having 1 ounce of water for every 10 pounds of their

body weight. This can all get very confusing.

So here are some practical tips about drinking water that should be a bit easier to remember.

* The young athlete should have 12-16 ounces of fluid up until about 30 minutes before a game or practice (remember that most water and sports drinks come in 20-ounce bottles).

* Keep sipping water during the practice or match.

* Start re-hydrating within 20 minutes of the conclusion of the practice or game. Research shows that the first 20 minutes are the most efficient time to start refueling. Try to take in 20 ounces within this window of time.

There are also many excellent sports drinks available that will provide hydration. Some advantages of sports drinks are better taste, and also the ability to replace electrolytes that are lost during sweat. But for most shorter duration sports events water will do just fine. Water is cheaper than a sports drink, and it has proved effective literally for millions of years.

* **FURTHER READING:** For Dr. Mishra's detailed look at sports and energy drinks, click [HERE](#).

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