

# The Hydration Continuum: Beverage Choices for Active People

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## Hydration

- Everybody pretty much understands that staying hydrated is essential to helping you feel and perform at your best. According to the Journal of Sports Science, exercisers who drink fluids and maintain hydration can last up to 33 percent longer compared to those who don't drink any fluids during a workout. And, even as little as two percent dehydration can cause a drop in endurance.
- Yet with all the different hydration beverages on the market, how can you determine which beverage would be best for your active occasion, and more specifically, what types and how much of what ingredients should you look for in each beverage to help meet your hydration needs?
- To help figure this out, let's take a closer look at the different options as if they were lined up on a hydration continuum, starting with the basic beverage choice: water.

## Water

- Water is a great thirst quencher and is essential for all bodily functions. During sedentary or light-active occasions, water can meet your hydration needs. However, during any activity that causes you to work up a sweat, water's great thirst-quenching properties and its lack of flavor can make it challenging for active people to drink enough to stay properly hydrated.
- Since many exercisers arrive at the gym inadequately hydrated before they even begin their workout, it can become an even greater challenge to increase fluid intake and stay properly hydrated with just plain water alone.
- In fact, research shows that active people tend to replenish only about half of the fluids they lose during a workout when they only drink plain water. For those who may have a challenging time drinking enough, a step up the hydration continuum may be warranted because a fitness water may be a better option.

## Fitness Water

- Fitness water is a lightly flavored hydration alternative to plain water that tends to be low in calories. It's a great option for people who typically drink plain water during a workout or throughout the day. Research shows that physically active people often drink more of a lightly flavored beverage than they will of plain water, helping them to improve their fluid intake and maintain proper hydration.
- However, not all fitness or enhanced waters are the same, so it's important to look at the label to see what's included. Some enhanced waters or vitamin waters can contain 50 calories or more per eight ounces, the same as a regular sports drink. Recognize that they tend not to contain the other benefits found in a sports drink, such as the appropriate types and amounts of carbohydrates and electrolytes. For those who want a beverage that closely resembles water in calorie content, look for a flavored, enhanced water that contains no more than 10 calories per eight ounces, such as Propel.
- Moving up another step on the hydration continuum, for active people who want to get the most out of their bodies during exercise, a functional sports drink is the optimal choice.

## Sports Drinks

- Sports drinks are ideal for active people who want to replace what they lose in sweat and supply their muscles with fuel during a workout, training or race.
- When you sweat, you probably know you lose more than just water -- you also lose electrolytes, particularly sodium, the most critical electrolyte lost and a key component of the hydration process. When exercising intensely for longer than approximately 45 minutes, it's important to consider replacing what you lose in sweat to maintain proper rehydration.

- However, a sports drink containing too little sodium will not promote optimal rehydration. When selecting a sports drink for intense exercise, look for at least 70 mg of sodium per eight-ounce serving, which is what the National Athletic Trainers' Association (NATA) suggests to help stimulate thirst, increase voluntary fluid intake, maintain fluid balance and ensure sufficient hydration.
- Besides sodium, a properly-formulated sports drink should also include the right amount of carbohydrates (the primary and most important energy source for the body during exercise) to fuel working muscles, fight fatigue and provide sweetness.
- Sports drinks with a carbohydrate level of about six percent (approximately 14-15 g of carbohydrates per eight oz. serving) have been demonstrated by research to promote rapid fluid absorption and supply enough energy to allow active individuals to maintain their physical performance.
- Keep in mind that if a sports drink contains too much carbohydrate (above 18 grams of carbohydrates per eight oz.), it will hinder fluid absorption. If the drink is too dilute (not enough carbohydrates) then you'll get the fluid you need, but without the appropriate amount of energy needed to fuel working muscles.
- Sports drinks branded "low-calorie" or "low-carb" may make it difficult to get the recommended amount of carbohydrate energy (30-60 grams/hour) that athletes need to perform at their peak during intense exercise and may not always contain the right amount of sodium and other electrolytes. That's why it's important to look at the Nutrition Facts label to see what's included -- or what should be included -- to help you with performance.
- Advancing along the hydration continuum, rehydration becomes an even greater task for those training for and/or participating in endurance activities, such as a marathon or triathlon. Fluid and electrolyte losses -- specifically sodium -- become substantial over an extended period of intense activity. For example, an endurance athlete can lose almost three times the amount of daily recommended sodium intake during a marathon or long-distance triathlon.

### **Specialized Sports Drink**

- For these athletes, a specialized sports drink with ample sodium would be ideal to help replace their larger sodium losses. Gatorade Endurance Formula is a good choice, as it contains nearly twice the amount of sodium, 200 mg. per eight ounces, compared to Gatorade Thirst Quencher. This is meant to match what an endurance athlete loses in sweat, improving overall hydration and helping sustain performance. In fact, many endurance races now serve specialized sports drinks on-course during a race.
- Finally, while plain water, fitness waters, sports drinks and specialized sports drinks can be good options based on your hydration needs, another group of beverages, energy drinks, sometimes get grouped incorrectly into the hydration category.

### **Energy Drinks**

- Energy drinks, such as Red Bull or ROCKSTAR, are not primarily designed as hydration beverages or to help with fluid intake/replacement. The amount you would need to consume for proper hydration could become counterproductive due to the overabundance of caffeine consumed.
- Though views on caffeine vary in terms of exercise, research has shown that ample amounts of caffeine (e.g., > 200 mg) consumed before an endurance activity (such as a marathon or triathlon) can enhance performance in some athletes. However, not everybody responds favorable to caffeine, and research has shown that there is not one set amount to help (or potentially harm) performance.
- Remember, when selecting a hydration beverage, it's important to check out the Nutrition Facts label to be sure you're getting what you want out of that beverage to help you with hydration and performance needs.