

Heat Illness And The Dangers of Dehydration

When your athletes practice and compete, they sweat. Sweating is a good thing because it's the body's natural cooling mechanism. However, sweating also results in fluid and electrolyte loss, which can lead to dehydration if fluids aren't replaced.

Athletes often underestimate their fluid needs because they rely on thirst. Thirst is not a good indicator of fluid needs. Many athletes come to practice and games already dehydrated. Physical activity furthers the condition and by the time an athlete feels thirsty, dehydration has already set in. Even levels of dehydration of as little as one to two percent (2.0 – 4.0 lbs for a 200 lb athlete) can lead to premature fatigue and impair physical and mental performance.^{1,2}

Water is Not Enough

Water is a good beverage but it has limitations. It doesn't provide energy in the form of carbohydrate that athletes need to refuel, and it lacks flavor and sodium so athletes stop drinking before their fluid needs are met.³

Know The Early Warning Signs Of Heat Illness

Dehydration

Symptoms:

- Thirst
- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Loss of Performance

...Do this

- Rehydrate, preferably with a sports drink. The fluid and carbohydrate can prevent fatigue and the sodium may help prevent muscle cramps.
- Stop activity and massage cramped muscles, if necessary.

Heat Exhaustion

Symptoms:

- Dizziness
- Rapid Pulse
- Headache
- Weakness

...Do this

- Stop exercise. Replace fluids. Rehydration is critical. Rest in a cool, shaded area until all symptoms have passed.
- If dizziness continues, lie down with legs elevated to promote circulation. Seek appropriate medical attention.

Heat Stroke

Symptoms:

- Loss of coordination
- Belligerent
- Drowsiness
- Nausea
- Dizziness / Fainting

...Do this

- Get out of the heat and seek immediate medical treatment. Heat stroke is an emergency that calls for fast cooling with ice baths or any other available means.

The above symptoms of dehydration, heat exhaustion and heat stroke are not additive, which means an athlete could experience heat stroke in the absence of other symptoms. Seek immediate medical assistance at the first signs of serious or unusual symptoms.



1. Sawka, MN & SJ Montain. *Am J Clin Nutr* 72(suppl):564S-572S, 2000. 2. Gopinathan, PM et al. *Arch Environ Health* 43:15-17, 1988. 3. Wilk, B & O Bar-Or. *J Appl Physiol* 80:1112-1117, 1996.