

Dehydration

Proper hydration is a key to successful athletic performance. More importantly, it can also help prevent heat-related illness. In athletes, dehydration can cause decreased coordination, fatigue and muscle cramps. It is important to monitor fluid intake before, during and after exertion.

Early signs of dehydration can be non-specific and include:

- Dark urine
- Dry lips and mouth
- Thirst

Signs of advanced dehydration include:

- Decreased athletic performance
- Muscle cramps
- Fatigue
- Disorientation
- Dizziness
- Apathy
- Irritability
- Increased heart rate and breathing

Athletes with any of these signs should rest and drink water or sports drinks. If athletes don't improve, feel dizzy or faint, or are not producing urine output, they should be seen by a physician. Seek emergency treatment if an athlete is disoriented, unable to drink or has pale skin.

Hydration Before Exertion

Several days before a work out or competition, you should stay well hydrated. Passing a large amount of pale urine about six times per day indicates you're drinking enough of the right kinds of fluids, specifically water. Avoid alcohol and caffeinated beverages. About an hour prior to a work out, drink 16 to 24 ounces of water or other non-caffeinated beverage. Immediately before the activity, drink another four to eight ounces of water or a sports drink.

Hydration During Exertion

During exercise, you should drink six to eight ounces of fluid every 20 minutes. During periods of exertion lasting longer than sixty minutes, some of what you drink should include a sports drink to replace lost sodium and other minerals (electrolytes).

Hydration After Exertion

Rehydrate after activity with water or a sports drink by taking in 20 to 24 ounces of water for every pound of fluid lost. Your urine should appear light yellow. If it's dark, keep drinking fluids.

Treatment

Treatment for mild to moderate dehydration can often be rest and simple rehydration by drinking fluids. Intravenous (IV) fluids may be required in some cases of moderate dehydration. Cases of severe dehydration should be treated as a medical emergency and hospitalization, along with IV fluids, is necessary. Immediate action should be taken.

