

Maryland State Youth Soccer Association

Preventing Dehydration: Here's How (III) / Action Steps!

The previous two articles provided you a strong understanding of dehydration and the affects it can have on your body. But how much should you drink, what should you drink, and when should you drink it? It is questions like those that will be addressed in our final chapter of an ongoing problem.

Depending on your body's physical demands, length of play, intensity of play and environmental conditions, your child's individual fluid intake will vary. Let's call step one "Pre-Hydration". Before you take you car on a long family trip, you take it in to get checked out and "top off your fluids". Not a bad idea for the body too. But like a car, it would depend on how well it is running and how far it has to go.

If you are only playing one game or know there is going to be a "hot" practice, starting to hydrate about 2-4 hours before can be very helpful. This is easier during the summer as many kids are not in school and you can remind them. But whether it is during the school year or not, drinking water should be discussed with all players no matter what the environment. When they urinate prior to playing, it should be "lemonade and not apple juice". Also, do not try to play catch-up by drinking a lot at one time. The intake should be a little at a time to avoid any stomach issues.

If you are playing in a tournament, you can even start pre-hydrating the night before, then start taking in fluids 2-4 hours prior to playing. One important key not mentioned is know where the bathrooms are where ever you are playing as you may need to frequent them.

During a game or activity, you should be drinking 4-8 ounces of water every 15-20 minutes to maintain hydration levels. Naturally, this varies depending on the all the variables discussed above. For those kids that have to have a sports drink, my recommendation is cutting the sports drink with water; at least ½ water to ½ sports drink but a better formula is 1/3 sports drink to 2/3 water. For events longer then an hour (tournaments), you can increase the percentage of sports drink. Remember, your goal is not to loose more then 2% of your body weight.

The part that gets missed by athletes of all ages is rehydration. When you sweat, when you urinate, when you blink, when you breathe, your body is loosing water and it needs to be replaced as soon as possible. Most studies show that you have 45 minutes to 1.5 hours to replace the fluids you lost. It is hard to truly calculate the amount needed to replace what is lost, but 2-3 cups of water for every pound lost is a great start. This helps so many areas of the body but for the young athlete, it will help prevent soreness that usually follows a hard game or practice. Watered down sports drinks or fruit juices are great here before loading up on less healthy beverages.

A couple thoughts to remember:

1. Drink before, during and after an event.

2. You should know that most of the research on sport drinks is done on adults, not kids. So just because their favorite super-star is drinking it, it does not mean they should as well.
3. Be aware of drinks that are “thirst quenchers”. That may prevent additional fluid intake that may be needed.
4. Avoid carbonated and caffeinated beverages as they will affect your hydration levels in different ways.
5. You can over hydrate but documented cases in children are very rare.

Stay hydrated and enjoy the season. The cooler they stay, the longer they play!

Yours in Health,

Dr. Sok