

Kids Need To Drink Fluids Before, During and After Sports

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Here are the key points to keep in mind in making sure your child drinks enough fluids while playing sports to perform at her best and avoid dehydration:

» **Kids should drink before, during and after sports.** To prevent [dehydration](#), or, worse yet, [heat illness](#), you should encourage your child to drink cool fluids [before, during, and after](#) physical activity.

» **Kids should drink on a schedule, not when thirsty.** Your child need to regulate his fluid intake by drinking according to a [schedule](#), rather than in response to thirst, because thirst is not an accurate measure of a child's need for fluid. By the time your child says he is thirsty, he is *already* dehydrated. Consuming cool fluids at regular intervals during exercise protects your child's health and optimizes athletic performance.*

» **Kids should drink from their own water bottles.** Children should have their own personalized water bottles and need to be reminded to drink 5 to 9 ounces (10 to 18 1/2 ounce "gulps") every 20 minutes during activity, depending on weight (Teenagers should drink more). Younger children should be given water bottles with marks on the sides showing how much they should drink each time or told how many "gulps" to drink.

» **Kids' fluid intake needs to be supervised.** Children do not instinctively drink enough fluids to replace water losses, so it is essential that you watch to see how much water they actually drink. Parents should remind their kids to drink to stay hydrated, and make sure that their coaches see that they drink enough fluids during practices and games.

» **Kids need to be watched for signs of heat illness.** During prolonged exercise, children and adolescents may not recognize the [symptoms of heat stress](#) and may push themselves to the point of heat-related illness. It's your job, and the coach's, to recognize the warning signs and act immediately.

Choosing the right fluids » **Sports Drinks Are Best.** The best source of fluid to hydrate the body - especially during intense exercise in the heat - is a sports drink. Your child will be more likely to drink the fluids she needs if you give her a flavored sports drink that tastes good and stimulates thirst. While sports drinks are absorbed just as quickly, and promote optimal cardiovascular function and temperature regulation as well as plain water, they offer the following advantages:

- » Sports drinks contain glucose and sodium, which increase the rate of fluid absorption by the small intestine;
- » By providing carbohydrates for working muscles, sports drinks improve performance during both prolonged exercise (lasting an hour or more) and when exercising for an hour several times a day; and
- » They encourage drinking by "turning on" the thirst mechanism (research has shown that children stay better hydrated when drinking sports drinks compared to plain water).

» For optimal absorption and performance, look for sports drinks that contain:

- » 4 to 8% carbohydrate (10 to 18 grams per 8 ounces)

» About 36 to 77 calories per 8 ounces.

» Because most sports drinks contain 5 to 8% carbohydrates, it's a matter of personal preference: have your child try several sports drinks to find the one that works best for her. Note, however, that research has shown that children and those in early adolescence prefer *grape-flavored* sports drinks to apple or orange.

» **Avoid sugary or carbonated beverages.** Beverages that contain more than 10% carbohydrate (about 96 or more calories per 8 ounces), such as fruit juices, or energy drinks, or are high in fructose, like carbonated soft drinks, should be avoided. They are absorbed more slowly and can cause stomach cramps, nausea, bloating and diarrhea.

» **Avoid caffeinated beverages.** Children should avoid drinking ice tea or soft drinks containing caffeine because they are diuretics (promote urination), and because the potential side effects - agitation, nausea, muscle tremors, palpitations and headaches - work against peak athletic performance. [Energy drinks](#) should NOT be used for hydration.

* **Note to parents of water and winter sport athletes.** Don't be lulled into thinking your child doesn't have as great a need to replace fluids as other athletes. A swimmer still loses body water through sweat in the pool, and can become dehydrated by sitting on the pool deck (a hot, humid environment) between exercise sessions or during a long meet (they always are!). Winter sports athletes (figure skaters, hockey players, skiers) also may not realize [the importance of fluid replacement](#) because they practice and play in a cool or cold environment, and because their clothing and equipment reduces the ability of the body to cool itself.