

Avoid Dehydration during Sports

Prolonged or intense exposure to our scorching Texas temperatures can lead to heat stroke, which is a medical emergency and requires immediate medical attention. To avoid heat-related illnesses, it is important that individuals participating in outdoor activities keep hydrated by playing it safe before and during outdoor activities. Below are some tips to prevent dehydration and heat-related illnesses.

1. **Drink water regardless of whether or not you are thirsty.** Thirst is not the only indicator of the need for fluids. Waiting until you are thirsty before drinking water is not recommended. By then, it could be too late.
2. **Drink water before exercise.** Guidelines from the National Athletic Trainers and Sports Nutritionists suggest drinking 12-20 ounces, 2-3 hours before beginning activity.
3. **Drink water often during exercise.** Drink plenty of water early and often during the time of physical activity. It's possible for an athlete to suffer from dehydration within 15 minutes during hot, humid conditions. You should drink 8-12 ounces of water every 15-20 minutes during exercise.
4. **Drink water after exercise.** According to the National Athletic Trainers and Sports Nutritionists, drink 3 cups of fluid for every pound lost during exercise. If participating in two-a-days, 80 percent of an athlete's lost weight should be replaced before the next practice, which will help to avoid heat exhaustion and heat stroke.
5. **Do not restrict fluids during training sessions or competition.** Dehydration can cause athletes to fatigue early and lose coordination skills.
6. **Be aware that the use of medications or over-the-counter supplements can affect body temperature control in hot weather.** Neglecting to stay hydrated while on medications can increase the chance of suffering from heat exhaustion and heat stroke.
7. **The smaller the child, the greater the risk for heat exhaustion.** Children should drink 3-6 ounces of fluid every 15-20 minutes.
8. **Can sports drinks replace water consumption?** Dr. James Rohack with Texas A&M University's College of Medicine suggests that water is best for simple fluid replacement and that sports drinks may be an appropriate choice for athletes who are involved in vigorous activities since they contain glucose and sodium.
9. **Taking salt tablets is NOT recommended.** Most foods provide enough sodium.
10. **Avoid drinks with caffeine.** Caffeine is a diuretic and can increase the chance of dehydration and muscle cramps.

References:

10 Essentials for Avoiding Dehydration, National Association for Sport & Physical Education, 2002.
Beat the Summer Heat by Staying Hydrated, H.E.A.D.s Up Health, Texas A&M University, 2005.

Compiled by Lisa Norman, Extension Assistant, Texas AgriLife Extension Service, Family and Consumer Sciences, <http://fcs.tamu.edu>, August 2006.

Updated by Josefa Pena, Extension Program Specialist, September 2013.