

Hydration for Runners

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The Most Essential Nutrient: Water

Nutrients don't only come in the form of food; water is the

most important and often most forgotten nutrient. You can last a long time without food, but only days without water. Your lean body mass contains about 70 to 75% water, with fat containing much less, or about 10 – 40% water. Because of increased muscle mass, men's and athletes' bodies contain more water than women, overweight, or older persons, because of their proportionately lower muscle and higher fat content.

Water is:

- The solvent for important biochemical reactions, supplying nutrients and removing waste,
- Essential for maintaining blood circulation throughout your body,
- The maintainer of body temperature. As you exercise, your metabolism and your internal body temperature increases. Water carries the heat away from your internal organs, where it can do serious damage (leading to heat stroke and even death) through your bloodstream to your skin, causing you to sweat. As you sweat and the sweat evaporates, this allows you to cool off and maintain a healthy body temperature, optimal functioning, and health.

Daily water intake must be balanced with losses to maintain total body water. Losing body water can adversely affect your functioning and health. Once you are thirsty, you've probably lost about 1% of your body water and are dehydrated. With a 2% water loss, you could experience serious fatigue and cardiovascular impairments. It's important to note that individual fluid needs differ depending on your sweat rate, the temperature, clothing, humidity, and other factors.

It is important that you:

- Drink enough water to prevent thirst.

- Monitor fluid loss by checking the color of your urine. It should be pale yellow and not dark yellow, too smelly, or cloudy,
- For short duration (less than 60 minutes), low-to-moderate intensity activity, water is a good choice to drink before, during, and after exercise,
- Supplement water with a sports drink that contains electrolytes and six to eight percent carbohydrates any time you exercise in extreme heat or for more than one hour.
- Begin exercise well-hydrated. Drink plenty of fluids the day before and within the hour before, during, and after your exercise session,
- Avoid alcohol the day before or the day of a long exercise bout, and avoid exercising with a hangover,
- Consider all fluids, including tea, coffee, juices, milk, soups, as acceptable (excluding alcohol, which is extremely dehydrating). The amount of caffeine in tea and coffee does not discount the fluid in them even if they have a slight diuretic effect, according to the most recent report by the National Academy of Science's Food and Nutrition Board,
- Eat at least five cups of fruits and vegetables per day, which all contain various levels of water.
- For those who experience high sodium losses during exercise, eat salty foods in a pre-exercise meal or add salt to sports drinks consumed during exercise,
- Rehydrate following exercise by drinking enough fluid (water or sports drinks) to replace fluid lost during exercise. Replace fluid and sodium losses with watery foods that contain salt (soup, vegetable juices). Replace fluid and potassium losses by consuming fruits and vegetables
- Determine your individualized need for fluid replacement. Use the following method to determine your personalized needs for fluid replacement:

During heavy exercise, weigh yourself before and after exercise. If you lose weight, you've lost valuable water. Add 3 cups of fluid for every pound lost; use this figure to determine the amount of water you'll need to prevent weight loss during exercise in the future.

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