

FLUID INTAKE AND SWIMMING

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WHY SHOULD SWIMMERS DRINK?

The atmosphere in most swimming pools is extremely hot and humid. Training and competing in such conditions can lead to dehydration. Dehydration will impair performance, reduce your ability to train hard and cause early fatigue.

If you do not want your performance to suffer it is essential to drink regularly during training and over competitions in order to replace the fluid that you are losing. Drinking is a good habit to adopt even if your training sessions are relatively short. This prepares you for the time when your training load will increase.

HOW MUCH A DAY?

Thirst is a very poor indicator of the need to drink. By the time you are thirsty you may already be dehydrated. You **must** drink before you are thirsty.

- 1) **Weigh yourself** (in costume only) before a training session and immediately after the session (when towel dried). A weight loss of 1 kg is the equivalent of 1 litre of sweat lost. Calculate how much fluid you are losing over a session and try to drink this quantity of fluid during the session. Avoid the temptation to wait until afterwards.
- 2) **The 'pee test'** involves monitoring your urine ! If you are going to the toilet regularly, producing lots of urine and it is clear in colour then you are well hydrated. If you are not 'paying a visit' as often as normal and notice that your urine is dark in colour, smelly and there is not much of it then you are dehydrated and need to drink as a matter of urgency .

WHEN SHOULD FLUID BE CONSUMED ?

The trick is to drink a little and often. Start before training by maintaining an adequate fluid intake through the day. Its easy to neglect your drinking habits when you are at school/college or work and to arrive at a workout already dehydrated.

Prior to a long workout try to drink a large glass of fluid (approximately 1/4-1 pint). This is particularly important before early morning training or prior to heats first thing in the day since you will lose a certain amount of fluid whilst you are sleeping. You may have to practice drinking smaller amounts to start with and gradually build up to a larger amount. Your body will quickly get accustomed to the feeling.

During the work-out stop at regular intervals to top up your fluid levels by consuming a small amount but often rather than huge gulps with big gaps in between . These drinks stops must be agreed with your coach. To minimize disruption to the session always take your bottle onto the pool side and leave it at the end of the lane within easy reach.

Continue to drink after the session . Remember that you may still need to rehydrate during this time. This may involve taking another bottle with you for use at the end of the work-out. Don't get caught short !

WHAT IS THE BEST THING TO DRINK ?

Its important to remember that no one drink is ideal for every swimmer. In fact requirements vary from individual to individual and are influenced by all sorts of factors such as the environment, length of session, cost and availability of the drink.

Years ago the scientists suggested that drinking water was the best way to replace the fluid lost during exercise. However, recent research has shown that, in fact, there is something better to drink than plain water .

Drinks which contain a small amount of carbohydrate and sodium replace the fluid lost via sweating more quickly than plain water alone.

Most sports drinks are formulated to contain some carbohydrate (usually between 5-8% or put another way, 50-80g per litre) and some sodium (usually about 300-500mg per litre). Research has shown that the use of these drinks during a work-out and over competition will help to ensure fast rehydration. The addition of a small amount of carbohydrate also provides additional energy which is of an advantage for those of you who run out of steam during long, hard work-outs.

The sports drinks which are currently popular amongst swimmers include Isostar, Maxim Electrolyte, Go, Gatorade and Lucozade Sport. You may like to try these and see which drink you prefer. They are all suitable fluid replacement beverages. The drink you finally chose will depend upon many factors including taste, cost and availability.

WHAT ABOUT COMMERCIAL DRINKS?

Commercial sports drinks can be costly. If you are training once a day or less there are home-made alternatives to try. A home-made drink is unlikely to be as effective as the commercial alternatives which have been specially formulated but often they are the only option . Furthermore these may still be more effective than drinking plain water.

When your training load increases to include 2 sessions per day it is worth experimenting with some commercial drinks since dehydration and energy depletion become more of a problem.