

UNIVERSITY OF WYOMING

Cooperative Extension Service

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Exercise & Fluids – How Much is Enough?

I don't want to jinx anything, but it appears that spring may finally be upon us. With the great weather we've been experiencing many are beginning to step up their exercise routines. This increase in exercise, especially as weather begins to warm, makes paying attention to our bodies' fluid needs much more important.

Improper hydration can put undue stress on vital organs, like the heart and kidneys—and both health and performance will suffer. Notice that I used the term *improper hydration*. Dehydration is commonly associated with exercise, but did you know that you can be overhydrated as well?

While most of us are probably aware of the dangers of dehydration—the sports drink manufacturers make sure of that—overhydration (known as hyponatremia) is less commonly known. Hyponatremia is a serious fluid imbalance that, at its most extreme, can cause death. It is simply caused by drinking too much fluid, whether it is a sports drink or water. Hyponatremia is more likely to take place during endurance exercise, where individuals may be consciously trying to 'stay hydrated', unaware that they are drinking too much.

So how do you know how much to drink during exercise? This is where things get tricky. Everyone sweats at a different rate, and this is highly dependent on the environment (temperature, humidity, etc.) as well as the intensity of the exercise. The best way to determine your individual fluid needs is to weigh yourself before and after exercise. Try to drink enough fluids to maintain your weight. If you gain weight during exercise you are drinking too much!

So do we really need those fancy sports drinks? Well, when you sweat you lose electrolytes (like salt) along with the fluid—these cannot be replaced by water alone. Sports drinks are a very convenient way to replace the carbohydrates and electrolytes that your body loses. However, there is no reason why you can't get these carbohydrates and electrolytes from 'real food'. Pretzels or salted popcorn are a good way to replace carbohydrate and electrolytes—though trying to eat these in the middle of a two-hour run may not be a great idea!

Whether you are a competitive athlete or simply exercise for fun you will quickly experience the benefits of proper hydration. Listen carefully to your body and be aware of your individual fluid needs to maintain hydration during exercise. The local UW Extension office will be hosting a seminar in Exercise Nutrition in Sheridan (March 24) and Buffalo (March 31). Please call (674-2980) or email ASAP if you're interested in attending. *Kentz Willis, M.S., is the University Extension Educator in Nutrition and Food Safety for Sheridan and Johnson counties. He can be reached via email at kwillis3@uwyo.edu.*