

Hydration for Athletes

We have all witnessed the tournament championship game when one team comes out hot as an August afternoon and the other is flat as a pancake. What happened? Why did a team that played so well during the tournament have a bad game when it counted most? There are many possibilities. One of the mostly likely culprits is often the one that gets overlooked the most: recovery. What an athlete does after a game or even a practice will dictate how soon their body will be ready to perform for the next competition.

With multi-game tournaments, recovery could be the difference between winning the championship game and going home early. In this article, I will outline recovery strategies to improve your team's recovery and thus improve their chance of taking home the big hardware.

Game day intensities and exhausting practices take a toll on the body. During an intense game, practice or training workout, the body is put through the ringer. It is possible for an athlete to lose up to 8 lbs of water during a single practice or game. If this water is not replenished, the athlete's health may be at stake. By implementing the following hydration strategies, your athletes will be prepared for the next big game.

Hydrate well before practices and games.

Encourage your players to drink lots of water throughout the week before a tournament or game. However, your athlete's should refrain from drinking large amounts of water in a short period of time. Drinking large amounts of water in short periods of time will not allow for proper absorption and ultimately cause an increase in urine production. If your athletes are practicing and playing games all week, hydration becomes even more important. Athletes lose their hydration status faster than the general population. An athlete requires his/her body to move, run, jump and react; furthermore an athlete puts his/her body through multiple environmental factors such as heat and cold. All of these factors rob the fluids that the athlete needs to stay hydrated. On hot days, an athlete must be even more aware to consume fluids and on cold days the body requires water to generate and maintain body heat.

An athlete should not wait until they are thirsty to begin consuming water; thirst is usually the first sign of dehydration.

The goal should be to consume water frequently enough so the athlete does not get thirsty. I recommend that athletes consume 80-100 ounces of water a day. A good rule to follow during practices and games is for the athlete to consume 5-10 ounces of water every 20-30 minutes. This is even more important on very hot days. This may seem high, but if an athlete is able to substitute other quality fluids with water it is very easy for an athlete to consume this amount of water in a day. However, an athlete should never try to hydrate himself/herself by consuming soft drinks. Soft drinks can be detrimental to performance because they dehydrate the body.

A good rule to follow during practices and games is for the athlete to consume 5-10 ounces of water every 20-30 minutes. This is even more important on very hot days.

Hydration for Athletes

Sports drinks can be beneficial for the athlete, but can also be counterproductive if consumed excessively.

Sports drinks provide replenishment of vital nutrients and provide the athlete with fuel to stay energized. However, consuming sports drinks constantly throughout a game or practice can be detrimental to the athlete's performance. An athlete should drink only a few ounces of sports drink every 15-20 minutes during a game or practice. Consuming more than this amount can leave the athlete feeling groggy, drowsy, and unmotivated. Sports drinks can help in maintaining a good hydration status, but only if consumed with water. It is important that a sports drink is not used as a substitute for water.

Monitor proper hydration.

It may seem awkward to discuss urination with your players and their parents. However, urination can be a very good indicator as to proper hydration levels. Let your players and parents know that the players should be drinking enough water on a daily basis so that their urine is a very light yellow. Dark yellow urine is one sign of dehydration.

If you have not implemented these sorts of strategies with your athletes or have not given these topics much attention, I highly recommend doing so. These four simple steps will help ensure proper hydration. To help implement these strategies, assign someone to be in charge of drinks and nutrition during games. I recommend a motivated and task oriented parent. If you have any further questions on recovery or how to help your athletes improve their speed, power, agility and decrease injuries, please contact Tim.