

New guidelines regarding hydration!

Whether you're a novice runner or have been running (and perhaps racing) for years, you're surely familiar with the importance of staying well-hydrated. For years runners have been told that they needed to drink before feeling thirsty in order to avoid dehydration. However, the recommendations that runners, particularly those taking longer than 4 hours to finish a marathon, should drink "as much as possible" have changed. United States of America Track & Field (USATF) recently issued new guidelines regarding hydration.

New Hydration Recommendations

- Long-distance runners should consume 1 liter of fluid for every liter lost during a race or long training run, equaling a 1:1 ratio
 - Runners should begin races and training runs well-hydrated. You'll know you're well-hydrated when your urine is clear or pale yellow, not dark yellow.
 - Drink only when thirsty during a race or long training run, not every mile or so.
- Rather than plain water, drink a sports drink that contains sodium and other electrolytes.

Why New Recommendations Now?

These new guidelines have been developed because of recent changes in thinking among scientists and researchers in the sports medicine community. Several runners have died in the past few years at marathons, and the cause of death has been determined to be hyponatremia. Hyponatremia means literally "water intoxication". When you drink too much fluid, you flush much-needed sodium and other minerals out of your bloodstream. The lack of sodium and electrolytes can lead to seizures, fluid in the lungs, respiratory arrest and death if the runner is not given proper treatment.

As more and more runners train for and enter marathons, the average finishing times are increasing. Scientists have determined that runners who take longer than 4 hours to finish are the most likely to develop this dangerous condition. Medical personnel at finish lines have often mistakenly thought that a fallen runner was suffering from dehydration and have pumped them full of more fluids, which only exacerbated the condition. But now that researchers have had a few years to learn about and understand what happens to the body when a runner ingests too much liquid, those situations can be avoided in the future.

The Sensible Approach to Hydration

Being sensible about hydration can help you avoid heat illnesses (heat cramps, exhaustion and stroke), dehydration and over-hydration.

- Drink fluids only until your urine is clear. It isn't necessary to keep drinking (particularly the night before a race) so often that you have the need to urinate every 15-30 minutes.
- On hot, muggy days try to avoid training during the late morning or early afternoon hours. Run early in the morning or in the evening when the air is cooler.
- Never train in a sweat suit or nylon suit during hot weather to acclimate yourself to heat training or to lose weight.
- Choose sports drinks containing sodium and electrolytes rather than plain water for hydration during training and racing.
- Drink enough of a hydration sports fluid to give you clear urine prior to a training run or race, then drink only when you start to feel thirsty.
- Monitor your body. Some people sweat more than others. Some people also lose more minerals in their sweat than others. If you're the kind of person who finishes a workout caked with white salt around your hairline and/or under your arms, you may need to take in more of a sports drink than someone who loses less.

If you're running a marathon, pay attention to signals that you may be developing dehydration, over-hydration or a heat-related illness. If you start to feel woozy, overly fatigued, tingling in your fingers or toes and you feel a headache coming on, stop running and let medical personnel know that you need attention

Staying In-Tune

As a runner you need to be in-tune with your body. Even if you never race, it's still important that you maintain the proper levels of sodium and minerals in your bloodstream. Everyone has individual needs: you may need to drink 6 oz of fluid during a 25-minute training run, someone else may not need to drink at all during a 10K. Learn what your own body needs and adjust your fluid intake accordingly