

What Sports Drinks You Should Be Drinking

Sip to stay properly hydrated on hot summer runs.

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Published
June 13, 2013

Sip it: Water

Plain old water is almost always a good choice. If you're running for an hour or longer, the American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) suggests drinking two to four ounces every 15 to 20 minutes. Run shorter and you can drink less or go without (particularly if you're slower or have a lower sweat rate). The key is to follow your thirst, which will prevent overdrinking.

When: On shorter runs, between 30 and 45 minutes. On long runs when combined with carbs for energy.

Try: Keep a pitcher in your fridge (you're more likely to drink it chilled). Freeze a bottle so it stays cold midworkout.

Sip it: Electrolyte Mix

These tablets and powders add flavor and electrolytes (sodium, potassium, magnesium, calcium) to water with virtually no carbs (most use artificial sweeteners). While there's no proof electrolytes prevent cramping, they do assist in fluid balance and absorption. Flavoring your water also makes it more appealing to drink.

When: Any run where you want some flavor and extra electrolytes. If you're a salty sweater (your face regularly has salt streaks post-run), add a tablet to sports drink for longer workouts.

Try: Zym Endurance Sport Drink Tablets supply vitamins B6 and B12. Nuun Active Hydration Tabs offer caffeine-enhanced flavors.

Sip it: Low- (or No-) Calorie Sports Drinks

Zero-calorie sports drinks are artificially sweetened, flavored beverages that supply vitamins and some electrolytes without unwanted calories. Low-cal drinks contain some carbs but fewer than traditional sports drinks. While they don't pack enough fuel to power you through long runs, they do contain enough carbs to boost your mood and energy for a short period of time.

When: Runs that are 60 minutes or less. They're also a good choice for runners watching calories, or just for sipping during the day.

Try: Powerade Zero and Propel Zero Sport both supply electrolytes and vitamins—without any calories. Gatorade G2 has just 30 calories (seven grams of carbs) in 12 ounces.

Sip it: Sports Drinks

Sports drinks are a mainstay for runners, providing about 50 calories (or 14 grams of carbs) per eight ounces, along with about 100 milligrams of sodium and some potassium. This combo boosts performance and hydrates you. ACSM suggests consuming 30 to 60 grams of carbs per hour of exercise, which equals 16 to 32 ounces of sports drink per hour. Small runners and those who don't sweat a ton may find this is more than they can handle, so adjust amounts based on your needs.

When: Runs lasting an hour or more. At this point you need carbs to power your muscles. They're also great for speed workouts, which quickly eat up stored energy.

Try: Gatorade Thirst Quencher was the first, but there are plenty of options (Gu Electrolyte Brew, Powerade, Cytomax). Try different brands to find one you like.

Sip it: Endurance Sports Drinks

These beverages supply about 50 percent more electrolytes and 25 percent more carbs than traditional sports drinks. They also provide "multiple transportable carbohydrates" (MTCs)—meaning they contain more than one type of carb, such as glucose and fructose. This helps your GI tract take up more carbs, which provides your muscles with a greater amount of energy and can boost endurance.

When: Runs lasting two hours or more. Runners training at very intense levels may also benefit.

Try: Clif Shot Electrolyte Drink is made with two types of organic sweeteners. Eight ounces of Powerbar Ironman Perform Sports Drink Mix contains 17 grams of carbs and 190 milligrams of sodium.