

HOW TO STAY HYDRATED DURING PRACTICE

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BY JILL CASTLE, MS, RDN

Dear Splash,

My coach had a lecture for us about drinking things like soda and Gatorade during practice. He asked us to send a letter to the editor asking this question, "What should we drink during a swimming practice and how often?"

Drinking fluids during practice is very important, yet many swimmers save drinking for after practice. And, there can be barriers. My own daughter has complained stating, There isn't enough time, Mom. Nobody else does it, why should I? The breaks are our time for talking and it's awkward.

All the experts and all the science points to the importance of drinking fluids during practice, especially if muscles are to perform their best and the body can endure the demands of a long practice.

When figuring out what to drink, it's all about the duration of practice.

For one-hour sessions or less, swimmers can drink and stay hydrated with plain water. But, when swimming sessions last more than an hour, swimmers need to replace the primary sweat nutrients, sodium and chloride, as well as consume some carbohydrate to improve endurance and keep muscles fueled. This can be accomplished with a beverage containing electrolytes and carbohydrate, such as a sports drink.

Most sports drinks provide a blend of sugars, maximizing the carbohydrate uptake to muscles, and come in concentrations of 4 to 9% solution (or 14 to 19 grams per 8 ounce serving size). There has been research in young athletes showing that sports drinks containing 8% carbohydrate may cause gastrointestinal upset, so lower concentrations may be better tolerated.

Fitness waters and enhanced water don't provide enough carbohydrate for a long workout, and soda and other sugary beverages such as juice drinks, sweet tea, or lemonade are to be avoided as they may cause stomach distress.

How often should swimmers consume fluids during practice?

We can look to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) who set three guidelines for fluid consumption during exercise for youth. They say:

1. Appropriate fluid replacement should be available and consumed at intervals before, during, and after exercise.
2. Nine to 12-year-old children should replenish with ~3 to 8 ounces of fluid every 20 minutes, and adolescents may consume 32 to 48 ounces of fluid every hour.
3. For longer-duration activities (more than an hour), electrolyte-supplemented fluids, such as sports drinks, should be used to optimize hydration.

While science tells us that swimmers should hydrate every 20 minutes, how does one make that happen in the pool? My advice is to bring drinks (with your name labeled on it) to the edge of the pool, at the end of the lane where you are swimming and being coached. At each pause in sets, or at a break, take two to three swigs of fluid (an average gulp of fluid is about one ounce).

Get practical:

- For a young swimmer age 9-12 years, bring at least 12 ounces of water to the poolside for the first hour of practice, and another 12 ounces of sports drink if practice goes for two hours.
- For teens, enter practice hydrated and with good nutrition on board. Bring along a liter of water to consume the first hour of practice. After that, switch to a sports drink (bring a liter) to make sure you maintain hydration, keep your energy level up and enhance your endurance.
- Some swimmers don't like the taste of sports drinks. Use other techniques to enhance hydration, such as watered down 100% fruit juice, water and a salty food such as pretzels, or a sports gel and lots of water.

Are you staying hydrated during practice?

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