

Top 5 Beverage Choices for Swimmers

By Chris Rosenbloom, PhD, RD, CSSD

Just because you're in the water it doesn't mean you don't need to drink water.

After 30 minutes of swimming, dehydration can occur. Environmental factors contribute to a swimmer's dehydration—warm water temperature and warm, humid air around the pool can increase the need for fluids. The National Association of Athletic Trainers recommends drinking about 2 cups (16 ounces) of water 2 to 3 hours before a workout or swim meet with another 1 cup (8 ounces) 10 to 20 minutes before diving into the pool. Most workouts are long and strenuous, so drink about 1 cup of fluid every 10 to 20 minutes during your workout. Keep a sports bottle filled with water at poolside so it is in easy reach.

What should you drink? Try these 5 choices and switch up your drinks for variety.

1. Water is best for most athletes. If you don't like the taste of plain water, ask mom or dad to slice up lemons or limes to drop into your water bottle for a fresh taste.
2. Sports drinks are a good choice when you have long, hard workouts or have to race many times during a meet. Stick to the basic tried and true sports drinks...like Gatorade or Powerade because they provide a good balance of carbs, sodium and potassium to replace losses.
3. Light sports drinks or zero-calorie sports drinks. These beverages, like G2 or Powerade Zero provide the same amount of sodium and potassium as regular sports drinks. These are good choices when you are trying to get lean or when injured and you are not able to train as hard or as long. These drinks contain artificial sweeteners, so drink them in moderation (1-2 servings per day).
4. Diluted fruit juice. Why dilute fruit juice? Fruit juice is too high in natural sugars to be a good fluid replacement. Fluids that have more than 6 to 7% carbohydrate (fruit juice has about 10% and some fruit juices even more) takes longer to leave the stomach so fluids don't reach your working muscles as quickly.
5. Low-fat milk is a good pre-workout and post-workout drink because it provides carbs, sodium, potassium (like sports drinks) with the added benefit of protein for muscle recovery and calcium for strong bones. Choose fat-free or 1% milk to lower the fat content; and it is OK to choose low-fat flavored milk like strawberry or chocolate if you prefer the taste.

Staying hydrated can help improve your performance and keep you healthy. Develop an individualized fluid plan and don't wait until you are thirsty to drink...stay ahead of thirst so you don't get dehydrated.

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