



The Battle Of the Beverages

Sip or skip? How to find the right sports drink.

BY ALYSSA SHAFFER

There was a time when water was the ultimate sports drink. Today shelves are packed with dozens of options for athletes looking to stay hydrated and improve power, speed and energy. Which ones can make you a winner and which are a waste of money and calories? Here's our guide to the most popular sports beverages and how they can help, or hurt, your game. Regardless of which you choose, the USTA recommends that, in addition to eight 8-ounce glasses of fluids on a regular day, you drink 16–20 ounces within two hours before you hit the court and 4–8 ounces on each changeover.



Traditional Sport Drinks

Think: Cytomax, Gatorade

When to sip: Most of us have had a classic sports drink at some point. Many experts say that it's a good option from a performance point of view. "A traditional sports drink has all

the necessary elements: water for hydration, carbs for energy, and electrolytes, especially sodium, lost during sweat," says Michael Bergeron, Ph.D., a consultant for the WTA tour and director of the National Institute for Athletic Health & Performance and Center for Youth Sports & Health in Sioux Falls, S.D.

Studies have shown that consuming a sports beverage containing 6–8 percent carbs increases speed and endurance. Other research has demonstrated that having sodium during play helps you stay hydrated, so you're not as likely to cramp on court. That's especially important if you're playing in a tournament, since you have less time to rehydrate between matches.

"At match time, most of the professionals will use a sports beverage," says Page Love, M.S., R.D., head of Nutrifit Sport Therapy



Inc. in Atlanta and a consultant for the USTA. "They need the quick energy source to help get through that third or fifth set."

When to skip: The average recreational player doesn't put himself through the same rigors as Roger Federer or Serena Williams. That means drinking Gatorade off court can be a waste of cash and calories. "These are called sport drinks because you're only supposed to drink them when you're active," says Susan Kleiner, Ph.D., R.D., owner of High Performance Nutrition in Mercer Island, Wash. "You should use those calories when your body knows what to do with them." You could gain up to 10 pounds if you consume 16 ounces, or 100 calories, of Gatorade each day for a year. Another negative is that a sports drink's unique mix of sugar, acidic content and other additives can erode and stain tooth enamel even more than soda.



Low-Cal Sports Drinks/ Flavored Waters

Think: EmergenC, Powerade Zero, Propel, Ultima Replenisher
When to sip: Calorie-conscious

players have probably noticed new products concocted to replenish vitamins, minerals and other nutrients without adding to their waistlines. Some are designed solely to replace electrolytes like sodium and potassium; others use artificial sweeteners and flavors to make them tastier. For the most part, nutritionists say, lower-calorie options work for short workouts of an hour or less, or to keep you hydrated throughout the day. "A lot of the female pros use these drinks off the court or in practice because they're a good source of fluids, especially if they don't like the taste of plain water," Love says.

The added sodium can be especially important if you're a "salty sweater" and often have a salty residue on your skin or clothes after working out. "Some people need to replace those lost electrolytes without necessarily adding extra calories," Kleiner says.

When to skip: If you're playing in hot conditions or you're on court for more than

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an hour, your muscles need a new energy source in the form of fast-digesting carbs, which means calories. "These fitness waters may not be enough for competitive players in three-set situations when their engines are starting to run out of fuel," Love says.

Also, keep in mind that the electrolyte to look for is sodium. "You'll get most of the other minerals, like potassium, magnesium and calcium, in your diet," Bergeron says.



Energy Drinks

Think: Red Bull, Rockstar

When to sip: More than just a late-night study aid or party boost, energy drinks have made their way into sports. Many are loaded with sugar and caffeine, as well as herbs

like ginseng and yerba mate. Research has shown that these drinks can increase both muscular and aerobic endurance.

When to skip: For the most part, experts tend to steer players away from energy drinks. Bergeron says that while they do enhance physical performance, "there's a lot of negative things that can also go with these drinks." Too much caffeine, for example, can make you jittery and hurt your game (not to mention your stomach). "I'd rather see tennis players get their energy from eating right and resting well," he says.



Mineral or Plain Water

Think: Evian, San Pellegrino, tap water

When to sip: Water is the cheapest and easiest thing to drink. It helps transport glucose, oxygen and fats to working muscles and carries away byproducts such as carbon dioxide and lactic acid. When you exercise, water regulates body temperature by absorbing heat from the muscles and dissipating it in the form of sweat.

When to skip: If you drink gallons each day, it's possible to overhydrate with water, which can dilute levels of sodium in the bloodstream. To prevent this, some experts recommend mineral water, which contains a small amount of electrolytes. "You'll still be getting some sodium into your system, but you won't have all the calories or artificial taste associated with sports drinks," says Dr. Seth Feltheimer, an internist at New York Presbyterian Hospital at Columbia University. Other experts say there's not enough sodium in mineral water to make a difference. When in doubt, Bergeron says, start slowly. "You can always begin a match with water and switch to a sports drink or other beverage with carbs and electrolytes if you're playing for more than an hour, or if it's excessively hot or humid." ●



STAYING IN THE GAME

Open Airways

Don't let breathing issues keep you from hitting the court

Playing tennis without being able to breathe freely isn't just unpleasant, it can drag down your game. "Every year we see a number of athletes with upper respiratory symptoms that they say affect their play," says Dr. Mike Yorio, director of player medical services at the U.S. Open. The symptoms, such as a runny nose or shortness of breath, lead to discomfort and fatigue, conditions that can throw off your concentration and rhythm. Fortunately, there are things you can do to keep common breathing issues from hurting your game.

SEPTUM DEVIATION Novak Djokovic and Jelena Jankovic used to stop matches complaining of trouble breathing. Then they had surgery to correct their deviated septums. A deviated septum occurs when the cartilage, or septum, running through the middle of the nose is crooked. About 80 percent of the world's noses have septums that are off-center or bent, but less than one percent are seriously bothered by it, says Dr. Scott Stringer, an ear, nose and throat specialist at the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

The main symptom is that breathing feels restricted to one nostril. It gets worse at night and when changes in temperature or humidity cause shrinking and swelling. In most cases, a doctor will prescribe a nasal steroid spray to help open airways. But since the problem is structural, the only way to fix a deviated septum long term is through surgery, where bits of cartilage are removed and the rest is straightened.

EXERCISE-INDUCED ASTHMA Exercise-induced asthma, also known as exercise-induced bronchospasm, comes on suddenly and usually goes away in 20–30 minutes. You experience shortness of breath, coughing, wheezing and a feeling of panic. It typically occurs during high-performance activities and in cold weather, when cool air hitting your lungs causes the bronchial tubes to swell and the airway to constrict.

If you suffer from EIA, see your doctor. He can prescribe a bronchodilator, an inhaler that can prevent asthma-like symptoms if used 15–20 minutes before play.

SINUSITIS AND RHINITIS Sinusitis, a bacterial infection in your sinuses that results in a stuffy nose and pain around the eyes, is best treated with antibiotics. Rhinitis (a.k.a. allergies) is an inflammation of the nose due to sensitivity to something, like pollen or grass, and causes a runny nose and watery eyes. Over-the-counter antihistamines reduce symptoms. A doctor may also prescribe nasal steroid sprays or allergy shots.

The best defense for these issues is preventative. Flushing out the nose with a saline wash, either using a squeeze bottle (a popular brand is NeilMed) or a neti pot, is recommended. If that doesn't appeal to you, keep nasal passages moist with a saline mist.—SARAH THURMOND