Best thing to drink before a workout? After? [1]

Alice,

What's the best thing to drink before a workout? After?

?Thirsty

Answer

Dear Thirsty,

Parched after a workout, a person might be tempted to grab the nearest sports drink to help rehydrate and reenergize. In fact, water is the best option for most people post-exercise. Your body depends on water to sustain chemical reactions and to maintain correct body temperature. It's possible to lose up to a quart of water during an hour of exercise through sweating, which can lead to dehydration if fluids aren't replaced. Drinking water before and during exercise also has benefits for performance.

Here are some tips for healthy hydration:

- Consume 20 ounces of water during the two- to three-hour period before you start exercising.
- Consume 8 ounces of water during your warm-up.
- For every 10 to 20 minutes of activity, drink 8 ounces of water.
- Within 30 minutes of finishing your activity, drink 8 ounces of water.
- For every pound of body water you lose during exercise, drink 16 to 24 ounces of water.
- Drink cool water as it is more quickly absorbed by your body than warmer water, and it is less likely to cause cramps.
- Avoid drinks that contain caffeine, a diuretic. They can also cause the jitters and shakes.
- Steer clear of alcohol, also a diuretic. In addition, it is a poor energy source, and can depress the heart and nervous system. (Obviously, alcohol also hampers your coordination and impairs performance.)
- Make hydration a part of your daily routine.

If you are an endurance athlete and workout for longer periods of time (more than 45 minutes), you may want to opt for a sports drink to fuel your muscles and replace electrolytes (such as salt) that are lost in sweat. There are many brands and flavors and several low-sugar energy drinks have recently been introduced to the marketplace. If the taste of these drinks is too strong for you, consider diluting them with cool water.
As always, listening to your body is good advice when it comes to hydration. Unfortunately, thirst alone is not a good indicator of how much you need to drink, because thirst is quickly quenched by drinking very small amounts of water; additionally, once you notice thirst, you are already on your way to dehydration. An easy way to check your hydration level is to notice the color of your urine. If it's a dark yellow or orange color, you could probably use some plain old water. A hydrated body excretes nearly clear-colored pee (although taking certain vitamins or supplements may turn your pee darker in color).

Remember, these tips for hydration apply to any kind of activity and you don't have to be a marathon runner to benefit from quenching your thirst. Stay hydrated, have fun, and good job with those workouts!

Alice!
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