Coach withholds water during practice? Help!  [1]

Dear Alice,

I have a question about dehydration. I am an eighteen-year-old female and play on a varsity basketball team. We usually have two-hour practices in which we work very hard. Our coach does not give us water breaks, and usually by the end of practice, we have cottonmouth and are "dying" for water. It is horrible. Is there any way that not having water during that time can be dangerous? Sometimes the team can feel sick or weak by the end of a practice.

Thirsty one

Answer

Dear Thirsty one,

Yo, what's up with your coach? We're talkin' school sports, not the Marine Corps. Perhaps your coach thinks that drinking water during practice will cause cramps and impair performance, or maybe s/he does not want to take time away from practice by having water breaks. Or, is s/he withholding water as a form of cruel and unusual punishment? Either way, withholding water from the team players is unhealthy and unethical. From your description, you and your teammates are exhibiting signs of dehydration. By the time you are thirsty, you already need fluids.

Water is vital to life for many reasons. Adult bodies are made up of about 55 to 60 percent water? children's bodies have an even higher percentage. This fluid is needed to:

- Transport nutrients to organs and muscles
- Carry waste products out of the body
- Provide an environment for chemical reactions to occur
- Act as a lubricant around joints
- Work as a shock absorber inside the eyes and spinal cord
- Serve as the solvent for minerals, vitamins, amino acids, glucose, and lots of other substances
- Help regulate body temperature
In carrying out our normal body processes, we lose about 2.5 quarts of water a day. That’s why we need to drink eight to ten cups (one cup = 8 ounces) of water every day. You need more if you exercise and sweat. The good news is that any non-caffeinated beverage counts, too.

To determine how much more fluid you need, follow this simple advice: weigh yourself before and directly after practice. Any difference reflects your fluid loss from sweating. For each pound you lose, you need two to three cups (16 to 24 oz.) of liquids. Even a modest two percent loss of body weight results in impaired sports performance. For a 125 lb athlete, this is as little as 2.5 pounds! A four to five percent loss in body weight (e.g., five to six pounds for a 125 lb person and six to seven pounds for a 150 lb person) can result in flushed skin, nausea, difficulty in concentrating, and an increased effort to be able to run, jump, and do just about anything physical. Once you lose more than six percent of your body weight in sweat, you risk dizziness, slurred speech, mental confusion, increased pulse rate, and other signs of heat illness. These effects are additive, meaning that dehydration can occur over time if you don’t rehydrate on a daily basis.

You don’t have to lose six percent of your body weight in one day. Your best strategy is to spread out your fluid intake over the course of a day. Some of this may be in the form of juice or milk. Ideally, drink two cups of water before exercise, then about two ounces every ten or fifteen minutes during exercise. Stay away from caffeinated beverages, which increase fluid loss.

Now that you’re in the know, you can bring this data to your coach. If y’all are still denied the water you need and deserve, speak with your parents, teachers, athletic director, and physician about your coach’s philosophy. Enlist their help in insisting that water or other sports drinks be available to you and your teammates during practice. If your coach is concerned about time, bring a bottle of water with you to practice, taking drinks during five-second breaks or whenever you have a chance.

Alice!

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