

# Hydration

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**S**tep onto a soccer field to play a game without enough water in your body and failure is in your immediate future. That's how critical hydration is to your athletic performance.

In my many years of working with soccer players, I rate dehydration as the number one reason for poor performance, both at practice and in games.

Common symptoms of dehydration are:

- Dry mouth (cotton mouth)
- Fatigue, both mental and physical
- Lack of sweat
- Headache
- Muscle cramping and weakness
- Nausea
- Dry eyes
- Heart palpitations
- Lightheadedness (especially upon standing)
- Decreased urine output / urine becomes darker yellow

For a 150-pound player, being dehydrated by just 2 pounds (1 quart) is enough to significantly impair performance. This can easily happen by half time of a game if you start a game even a little dehydrated.

**Y**oung athletes are particularly prone to dehydration, primarily because most do not make the effort to drink water throughout the day. The normal approach is to chug a bunch of water just before stepping onto the field to play. Or start practice and then immediately ask for a water break when they get "cotton-mouth" in the first few minutes of play. But by then, it is too late to do much good.

Here are some easy-to-follow guidelines that work well for most players. Quantities given are for a 150-pound athlete so scale them to your weight:

## **Daily consumption:**

- An easy way to ensure proper hydration is to carry a water bottle with you and sip from it throughout the day. That will also help you monitor how much you drink on a daily basis. Glass, BPA-free plastic or stainless steel containers are your best options to minimize contamination issues.
- The quality of water matters. Choose filtered water when possible, cool during hot weather.



## **In a Nutshell**

- Even slight dehydration can significantly impair soccer performance.
- Hydrate prior to, during and after training or games.
- Use glass, BPA-free plastic or stainless steel water bottles.
- Gulping water just before a game is not an effective way to hydrate.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine or stimulant-laden drinks as they can dehydrate you.

- A minimum baseline amount of water for a 150-pound athlete is two quarts (64 ounces) per day, not including exercise needs.

### **Exercise needs:**

- Consume 16 to 24 ounces of water two to three hours prior to your game or practice and 8 to 12 ounces 15 minutes before you play.
- Consume 8 to 12 ounces of fluid for each 15 minutes of activity.
- If your workout or game will last longer than 90 minutes, consuming a small amount of a “healthy” sports drink can help, particularly in heavy-sweat conditions.
- During halftime of a game, drink first, talk later. You have limited time to rehydrate so use it wisely.
- Re-hydrate immediately after exercising until your urine runs clear or the color of pale lemonade.
- Drink small amounts frequently rather than large amounts less frequently. Gulping a large amount of water right before a game is not an effective way to hydrate.
- Avoid alcohol and caffeine or stimulant-laden drinks as they can dehydrate you.

As a general rule, if you are thirsty the night before an early morning game, you are probably not sufficiently hydrated. Listen to your thirst and consume fluid in quantities that approximate sweat loss to avoid over-hydration. Over-hydration is rare but possible and can be hazardous.

**A**n example of the devastating effects of dehydration occurred many years ago in a men’s Colorado State Cup championship game in which I played:

*It was late June and a 105-degree, 20-mile-per-hour wind blew, popcorn-dry with not a cloud to block the blazing sun. From the chirp of the whistle, the emotionally-charged teams tore at each other with far too much pace for the conditions. Halftime was a fluid chug fest but for many players, it was too little too late. Midway through the second half, with limited substitutions done, the players who had started the game poorly hydrated began to cramp. At the end of 90 minutes, the score was tied 3 to 3 and only nine players on each team could still run. During double overtime, that was cut to seven. The others limped around the field, hobbled by leg cramps from dehydration. The trophy was hoisted by the team that could run the most at the end of the game, which thankfully was my team.*

The message here is to hydrate daily and well in advance so you can finish strong and not be the player who “bonks” out of training and games.

Until next time. Be Well, Play Well.

### **About the Author**

Curt Thompson is a practicing nutritionist and the author of the *Soccer Nutrition Handbook* ([www.NutritionCoaches.com](http://www.NutritionCoaches.com)). He is also a nationally licensed soccer coach and runs the Advanced Training Program at FC Boulder in Colorado.