

## **Children's summer sports activities**

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Children's summer sports activities and keeping children hydrated during summer sports, liability

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**Much has been written about the dangers of dehydration for children who are ill, however, another group at risk which can be easily overlooked is young athletes. This includes softball and baseball players, youth football players and even soccer players. According to Momsteam.com, an information source for parents whose children are involved in youth sports, "Dehydration can begin when an athlete loses as little as 1 percent (1%) of body weight. In a 70-pound child, that is less than 1 pound of weight lost through sweat. As little as a 2% decrease in body weight from fluid loss (e.g. 1.2 lb for a 60-lb athlete) can lead to a significant decrease in muscular strength and stamina".**

Children don't adapt as well as adults do to exercise in hot, humid weather. They produce more heat, sweat less and may be less likely to drink enough fluids during exercise all of which increase the risk of dehydration. In turn, dehydration can lead to heat-related illnesses, such as heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heatstroke. But you don't need to worry from the sidelines. Understand how heat-related problems happen and know how to prevent them.

### **Who's at risk**

Any child who exercises in the heat may be at risk of dehydration. The concern is often greatest for young athletes who participate in football, soccer, cross-country and other sports that start in late summer. Your child may be particularly vulnerable to dehydration and other heat-related illnesses during summer workouts if he or she:

- » Rarely exercises
- » Has had a recent illness that caused vomiting or diarrhea
- » Has had a previous heat-related illness

Football players face special risks in the heat when exercising hard while wearing full protective gear.

### **Know when to slow down or call it quits**

Sometimes it's simply too hot and muggy to go full throttle on the field. To determine when heat and humidity make strenuous exercise risky for young athletes, your child's coach may monitor the wet bulb globe temperature (WBGT) the standard index of temperature and humidity combined. If the WBGT is too high, outdoor athletic activities may need to be limited or canceled.

### **Spotting dehydration and other heat-related problems**

Even mild dehydration can affect your child's athletic performance and make him or her lethargic and irritable. Left untreated, dehydration increases the risk of other heat-related illnesses, including heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heatstroke. Encourage your child to pay attention to early signs and symptoms of dehydration, including:

- » Dry or sticky mouth
- » Thirst
- » Headache
- » Dizziness
- » Cramps
- » Excessive fatigue

Remind your child that he or she is responsible for reporting these signs and symptoms to the coach right away. Don't let embarrassment keep your child on the field. If dehydration is detected early, fluids and rest may be all that's needed. Also, you are the parent. Don't hesitate to walk down during a break and give your child some fluids. If your child seems confused or loses consciousness, seek emergency care immediately.

#### **Prevention is key**

If your child plays sports in hot weather, encourage him or her to drink plenty of fluids before, during and after practices and games. Teach your child the signs and symptoms of dehydration, as well as the importance of speaking up if they occur. Involve your child's coach, too. Talk to the coach about adjusting the intensity of practice depending on the temperature and humidity on the field and support the coach's decision to cancel games and practices when it's dangerously hot outside.

#### **What's better: sport drinks or water while playing a sport?**

**Water** Water is the most recommended fluid to take to replace water lost from perspiration and to combat thirst. In an hour of routine exercise, a minimum of 10-12 ounces of water is recommended. It is the ideal choice for rehydration because it moves faster from the stomach through the blood stream. It is also a very good idea to hydrate BEFORE the activity to be engaged in. A good rule of thumb: 1-2 hours before, 1 oz of water for every 4 lbs of body weight (i.e. 100 lbs = 25 oz)

**Other essential benefits from drinking water are:**

- » It facilitates healthy digestion.
- » It effectively transports the nutrients.
- » It regulates temperature through the form of perspiration.
- » It lubricates joints and muscle tissues.

#### **Sports Drink**

The blandness in taste of water makes some look for other alternatives. Sports drinks with its attractive colors and flavors are becoming a popular replacement for drinking water. It has more benefits like additional calories that enhance endurance and boost energy. Energy drinks can also reduce muscle damage due to extreme physical activity by replacing lost electrolytes. This, and uncounted advertisements are the reasons why sports drinks are popular compared to tasteless and colorless water.

#### **Sports Drink vs. Water**

The debate on What's better sport drinks or water while playing a sport? will depend on many factors such as the amount of water and ions lost in the body, the climate of the local environment, and the degree of activity done. One important method of fluid maintenance is to start drinking water or sports drink about two (2) hours before working out to top up the loss of fluid from perspiration during exercise and most importantly, after the work out. Weighing is also one way to know whether how much fluid has been lost and needs to be replaced.

#### **What Coaches Should Know**

When players are practicing or competing, coaches should follow the following steps to help prevent heat related

#### **BEFORE**

Allow 10-14 days of light activity in the heat for adjusting to warmer climate/temperatures, and schedule less intense practices using lighter equipment at the start of the practice season. Schedule practice during cooler times of day. Athletes should hydrate throughout the day. Coaches and parents should teach athletes how to monitor their hydration levels by checking the volume, frequency, and color of their urine. If they are hydrated, their urine should look like lemonade. If their urine looks dark, like apple juice, they may need to drink more fluids. Coaches should encourage athletes to weigh in and out before and after practices to determine individual fluid losses.

#### **DURING**

Schedule and enforce frequent drink breaks and rest periods during physical activity. Remove pads and practice in T-shirts and shorts. Reduce intensity and/or length of training with high temperatures and/or humidity. When it comes to keeping athletes safe on the field, water may not be enough. While water is fundamental to the body, it does not hydrate as effectively as a properly formulated sports drink with sodium. Ask athletes to buddy up during practice with a teammate to monitor for warning signs of heat illness. Overexposure to high temperature and humidity can cause heat-related illnesses. The National Weather Service issues heat alerts when the daytime heat index (a combination of temperature and humidity) is 105 ° F or more, which can dramatically increase the risk of the most serious heat-related illnesses. At 80-105 ° F, fatigue and heat stroke are also possible with prolonged exposure. Athletes playing in the heat for long periods of time wearing protective padding are especially at risk. Be prepared by having an ice-filled tub ready for immersing a player in case of an emergency. Carry a cell phone on the field at all times. Know the precise address of the practice or game field and any specific directions required by EMS responders. Remember to cool first before trying to transport the athlete.

#### **AFTER**

Weigh athletes following practice and compare to their weight beforehand to determine fluid losses. Coaches should monitor athletes to ensure they replace every pound lost during practice with approximately 20 ounces of fluid.

#### **Not All Athletes are Alike**

Certain types of athletes might be at a higher risk for heat-related illness and should be monitored closely. These types of players include: Those with a prior history of heat illness. Players with a medical history of gastrointestinal, diabetic, kidney, or heart problems.

Players who were recently (within 2 weeks) ill with upper respiratory illness or cold or flu virus. These athletes may require special attention by coaches and quick action if any symptom of heat illness is noticed.

#### **Age Matters**

Coaches working with kids should know children may be less tolerant of heat stress than adults, and may be at greater risk for heat illness.

#### **Hot Weather Safety Tips**

An important step in avoiding heat illness is adjusting practice or game length and intensity to the environmental conditions. Temperature and humidity combine to create conditions that can produce heat illness and dehydration.

An air temperature of 95 degrees Fahrenheit is high risk regardless of the humidity.

An air temperature of 85 degrees Fahrenheit and humidity of 60 percent or above.

An air temperature of 75 degrees Fahrenheit and humidity of 90 percent or above.