

## Replace Electrolytes Lost During Sports

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Balanced Diet, Sports Drinks Help By [Susan Yeargin, Ph.D, ATC](#)

Here's what you need to know about electrolytes:

#### Important for bodily functions

Electrolytes such as sodium, potassium, and chloride are necessary for:

- » Maintaining fluid levels in the body
- » Muscle contractions;
- » Nerve impulse transmission; and
- » Conservation of fluids.

**Lost during sports** » Sweating results in the loss of both electrolytes (particularly sodium) and water

» Water losses are proportionately greater than electrolyte losses, so the body's cells end up with a greater electrolyte concentration (this is the imbalance that is believed to lead to [heat cramps](#))

- » As the body becomes acclimated to the heat, the sodium content of sweat decreases
- » As children matures they also conserve more salt but sweat more.

**Replaced by foods in balanced diet** » **Salt:** Your child's regular diet should provide an abundance of salt. For instance, a 2-pound loss of sweat results in a loss of only 1 gram of sodium -- an amount easily replaced by moderate salting of food (one half teaspoon of salt). **Recommendation:** Do *not* give your child salt tablets

» **Potassium:** Replacing the small amount of potassium lost during exercise is easy. Orange juice, bananas and potatoes are all excellent sources of potassium. For instance, a large glass of orange juice will replace the potassium lost in about 4 pounds of sweat.

**Recommendation:** Do *not* give your child potassium supplements: not only are they unnecessary, they can cause excessively high potassium levels in the blood, resulting in an abnormal heart rhythm.

**When deficits occur** Electrolyte deficits, particularly sodium, can occur under the following conditions:

- » When [acclimatizing to a hot environment](#)
- » After repeated workouts in hot weather
- » During [ultra-endurance events](#) (50-mile runs, 100-mile cycling races, triathlons)
- » [Hot weather](#) in which sweat losses are greater
- » In an individual who is a "salty sweater."

Sports drinks containing sodium:

- » Reduce the risk of [hyponatremia](#)

- » Promote re-hydration following exercise by maintaining thirst (which keeps your child drinking) while delaying the production of urine. By contrast, drinking plain water *eliminates* thirst so your child stops drinking, and *stimulates* urine production.
- » Encourage fluid intake because the sodium makes them taste better.