

Sports drinks may not be as healthy as you think

By KIM GLOVER, R.D.H.

One of my patients is a high school basketball player who plays all year round. He is a superstar athlete with college basketball hopes. Well, guess what? Even superstar athletes are not immune to dental decay. At his recent dental exam, he had 11 cavities. His mom almost fell over when she heard this!

We needed to figure out what was causing these cavities. I didn't ask him whether or not he eats candy; I asked him what he drinks between meals. And sure enough, it looked like daily sports drinks were the culprit.

Sports drinks, even if they are sugar free, are very acidic. Drinking acidic beverages can soften teeth and actually pull the calcium right out of tooth enamel, leading to cavities.

It's important that our kids stay hydrated during sports, from the tiniest T-ball player to the state wrestling champion. Sports drinks may be harsh on the teeth, but is water enough? I asked Registered Dietitian Mary Lemm Davis to explain the best ways to keep our young athletes hydrated.

Is water enough for my child's hydration needs?

Yes, but ensure that your child is well hydrated before the event. (As little as 1 percent loss of body weight may hinder physical performance.)

The three-hour time period before a sports event is critical. Two to three hours before the game, offer foods high in carbohydrate

such as bread, rice, potatoes or pasta with vegetables and some protein. Encourage two to four cups of water as part of this meal. One to two hours prior to the game again encourage two to four cups of water. If the child is hungry, very light foods are recommended such as fresh fruit with crackers or bread. An hour to game time, food is not suggested, but another 2-4 cups



of water should be ingested. During the game or training, fruit such as watermelon, oranges or grapes can be offered with water.

Children need 3 to 5 oz. of water every 15 to 20 minutes during practice or games. Teens should drink 4 to 6 oz. every 15 minutes. Teen athletes should weigh before and after exercise to determine sweat loss and take in 16 to 24 oz. of water for every pound lost.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommends that children and adolescents be taught to drink water "routinely as an initial beverage of choice" and "generally

[as] the appropriate first choice for hydration before, during, and after most exercise regimens."

Are sports drinks helpful?

If a child or teen is exercising under an hour, water is the best choice for rehydration. Sports drinks are considered when physical activity has occurred for over an hour to replace fluid and electrolytes lost in sweat. Sports drinks may be high in sugar, which can cause cramping, nausea or diarrhea during exercise.

Sports drinks are advised in events lasting longer than 60 to 90 minutes. Read the label for carbohydrate or sugar content. Sports drinks containing 6 to 8 percent total carbohydrate are recommended to replace energy stores and fluid losses. Sodium and other electrolytes are normally replaced through foods eaten at the next meal.

How do I get my kids to drink more water?

Offer water at the temperature



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that the child prefers. Cold or cool water is fine. It is a myth that drinking cold water causes cramps. For outside activities in cold months, water that is warm or at room temperature may be more acceptable. Offer water to children early in life and often so that it becomes the beverage of choice.

How much fluid should I offer after post-practice, training, or game?

Within an hour after the sports event, offer foods high in carbohydrate such as fresh fruit, 100 percent fruit juice, whole grain bread, crackers, or a sandwich. Encourage 4 to 8 cups of water over the next several hours.

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Liquid	pH Level (under 5.5 can cause tooth decay)
Tap water	7.0
2% Milk	6.7
Vitamin water	4.0
Apple juice	3.5
Diet Coke	3.2
Gatorade	3.0
Lemon juice	2.0
Battery acid (for comparison only)	1.0