

The Power of Hydration

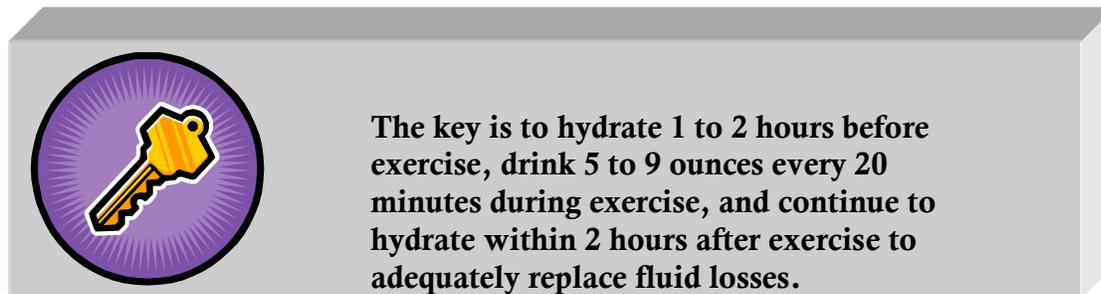


There is no doubt that young athletes have to be mindful of maintaining a balanced diet and adequate rest for optimal performance. However, one of the most critical components of an athlete's regimen is proper hydration. This is especially significant for our active children and young teens because they tend to use up more energy doing the same activity as older adolescents and adults, while producing up to twice as much heat.

During exercise, muscles generate heat that raises body temperature. As a result, the body produces sweat that cools its systems through evaporation. The fluid lost through sweat includes water, as well as important electrolytes such as sodium and potassium, which must be replaced to avoid disturbing the body's balance and the risk of overheating. Excessive dehydration can impair performance and increase the risk of heat-related illnesses such as heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke.

Ensuring fluids are available during practices or at games is not enough, especially since most young athletes don't instinctively drink fluid to replace water loss and most are already dehydrated before sensing thirst. It is vital that young athletes drink cool fluids **before, during, and after** exercise. Therefore, parents and coaches should take precautions to prevent heat-related illnesses for active children and youth by creating a **hydration plan**.

A schedule of hydrating before, during, and after exercise is essential for the young athlete's health and safety during bouts of exertion that exceed 60 minutes. Again, thirst is not a reliable indicator of fluid replacement needs, so adults need to make a plan, set a schedule, and supervise young athletes.



In addition, be sure to look for symptoms of dehydration, which include dry mouth, fatigue, headache, confusion, lack of coordination, nausea, weakness, or faintness, and be ready to seek medical help if symptoms persist after hydration. A significant number of student athletes are hospitalized each year due to heat related illnesses, and dehydration can cause death. If you think someone is at risk, **dial 9-1-1 immediately!**

An effective hydration plan is a valuable tool to ensure the health and safety of our students. The Orange County Department of Education is proud to collaborate with the Orange County Fire Authority, the Orange County Health Care Agency, Children's Hospital of Orange County, California Interscholastic Federation, Parent Teacher Associations, and Orange County school districts to launch the **Hydrated & Healthy** awareness campaign to make certain that coaches, parents, and athletes have the information and the resources necessary for adequate hydration. For more information, visit <http://hydration.ocde.us>.

This article was developed by the Orange County Department of Education for various education-based publications.