

Hydration and electrolytes

Electrolytes are essential to a properly functioning, sweating, body. You use them, you deplete them and then you need to replenish them. While the concept seems fairly simple, the exact mechanics around why we need to stay hydrated, the reason for replenishing electrolytes after sweating, and the protocol for drinking “at least 8” cups of fluid a day is sometimes harder to define beyond “because you’re supposed to.”



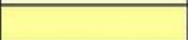





The Importance of Water

Your body depends on water for survival (it’s the main component of blood). It’s needed for critical body functions including: Delivery of substances including oxygen, nutrients, and hormones to the cells and removal of waste from the cells. Regulation of body temperature, control of intracellular and extracellular fluid levels. There are different beliefs around how much water you should be drinking in a day, though most follow the “6-8 glasses per day” recommendation. While this is generally good, as runners we may need even more fluid than that.

One of the easiest ways to test your hydration is through bathroom frequency and urine color. Your urine should be light yellow and you should be emptying your bladder on average 5-8 times per day.

AM I HYDRATED?

Urine Color Chart

1		
2		If your urine matches the colors 1, 2, or 3, you are properly hydrated.
3		Continue to consume fluids at the recommended amounts.
4		If your urine color is below the RED line, you are
5		DEHYDRATED and at risk for cramping and/or a heat illness!!
6		YOU NEED TO DRINK MORE WATER!
7		
8		

Another way to determine hydration levels (especially after a run) is a sweat test. This will help you determine just how much fluid you need post workout.

To test:

- Measure body weight naked before and after your run
- Sweat loss (ounces) is equal to body weight (pounds) before exercise minus body weight after exercise. 16 ounces (2 cups) of water should be consumed for every pound that has been lost.

How Electrolytes Can Help

The term “electrolytes” is really just a fancy name for minerals that help the body perform its natural functions; they include sodium, potassium, magnesium, chloride and calcium. These minerals, which dissolve in the fluids in our body and break into electrically charged ions, keep the body in balance. They work both independently and with each other performing roles such as helping to move glucose and other nutrients into your cells, and helping to remove waste products and extra water from your cells.

As runners, electrolyte balance is key for both successful training and optimal performance. When you have an imbalance of electrolytes, your body starts to remind you through stomach cramps, muscle cramps and spasms, side stitches and if it gets really extreme, dizziness, fatigue, nausea and more.

Don't let thirst be your reminder to reach for a drink, though. Usually by the time you feel thirsty, you're already on the road to dehydration. Sipping an electrolyte-rich beverage at some point during the day will allow you to stay refreshed and balanced, and avoid dehydration. Plus most people find it more appealing to reach for a flavored beverage than plain water all the time. Just be careful not to purchase one that's also loaded with lots of sugars and high calories (read your nutrition labels!).

It's easy to make your own drink by taking a bottle of water and adding a pinch of salt. You can add a cordial flavouring to that for taste.
