Q: I am training for a marathon. I know that it is important to stay hydrated, but I do not want to overdo it. What do you suggest? Also, should I consider a sports drink such as Gatorade?

A: Running a marathon or doing any strenuous activity in warm or hot weather can cause excessive sweating and result in water and electrolyte deficits. Dehydration can have a negative effect on health and athletic performance by putting you at risk for heat exhaustion and/or heat stroke. Dehydration, along with sodium depletion and muscle fatigue, can also cause skeletal muscle cramps. Hydration is essential before, during, and after exercise. The following are fluid recommendations for intense exercise, sporting competitions, or training for and running marathons:

- **2 hours before exercise**: Drink 16 ounces of fluid.
- **15 minutes before exercise**: Drink 8 ounces of fluid.
- **Every 15 – 20 minutes during exercise**: Drink 6 – 8 ounces of fluid.
- **After exercise**: Drink 16 ounces of fluid for every pound of water weight lost.

A sports drink is recommended during prolonged exercise in hot weather to meet carbohydrate needs and replenish electrolyte and fluid losses. Drinking one-half to one whole bottle every hour would be sufficient for hydration. After exercise, a sports drink could be used for fluid and sodium repletion, but normal hydration is restored within 24 hours if you are eating and drinking regularly.

Sports drinks are not recommended as everyday beverages. If you are not exercising, the additional calories may promote weight gain.

References:


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