

# Handling the Heat

Water is an important commodity to any athlete, but particularly to a roadracer on a sunny 90-degree day. Water makes up 60% of your total body weight and 70% of your muscles. It functions as a digestive aid, a major blood component, and a lubricant between joints. But most importantly, it acts as a coolant to offset the heat generated by muscles during a workout. If you sweat, you need to replace the water your body has lost. If you become dehydrated, you can experience shortness of breath, dizziness, a rapid pulse, headache, and extreme fatigue- not exactly what you want to feel when you're waiting for the flag to drop for a 25-lap trophy dash. The key to combating dehydration is effective rehydration-what to drink and when.

First of all, the simple fact is that nothing is better than water to replace what is lost during heavy sweating. Studies done on motocrossers, triathletes, and soccer players revealed that water gets into your system quicker, and in a more usable form than anything else does. In fact, soft drinks or those sugary "energy" sport drinks advertised everywhere is actually detrimental to the rehydration process. As an example, a 128-pound athlete might lose 4 pounds of water through sweat during a hard workout, or about 5% of the body's water (you big 200 pounders could be losing up to 20 pounds or more!) If the same athlete drinks 12 ounces of plain water, only 30% of the water will still be in the stomach 15 minutes later- the rest is being used to replenish the body's supply. If 12 ounces of a soft drink is consumed, all 100% of it will still be in the stomach 15 minutes later-nothing has been sent into your body's system. The sugar (glucose, fructose, or sucrose) in the drink significantly slows the rate at which the fluid leaves the stomach and filters into your system.

Secondly, when to drink water is nearly as important as what to drink is. Thirst is not a reliable indicator; a man who sweats away 4-6 pounds worth of water during competition (not uncommon) will experience a temporary thirst satisfied by drinking only a pint of water. Ideally, athletes should drink 2 cups of water for every pound of water lost. Water should also be consumed during the activity (marathoners particularly) but since this is impossible for racers, replenishing your fluid loss between sprints is a must. It's difficult to calculate how much sweat has been lost during an intense workout, but to be safe; an athlete should drink at least a ½ cup of water every 10 to 15 minutes. This will provide the body with the fluid it needs without the accompanying "bloated" feeling.

What does all this mean for Ricky Racer on a hot day of roadracing? First, increase your consumption of water the week before the race. Get your body used to being hydrated rather than trying to drink several gallons of water the day of the race. How do you know when you're properly hydrated? Your urine will be almost clear. Second, stay away from energy/sugary drinks and get used to drinking water. It's cheaper, more effective and plentiful. If you can't handle the taste of plain water, mix a 50/50 (preferably weaker) combination of an energy drink or something else with water (I use sugar-free Kool Aid mixed real watery.) Thirdly, drink often during race day. Don't rely on your thirst as a barometer for what your body needs. Drink small amounts often rather than large amounts infrequently.

So what's the bottom line? Just this- being properly hydrated on a really hot day can mean staying mentally sharp and energetic rather than feeling weak and listless. Maybe that's just the edge you need over your fellow racers.

Information for this article was provided by CRA member Kevin Foster and taken from Food Power: A Coaching Guide to Improving Performance, and Discover magazine, October 1983