

The Importance of Staying Hydrated

Now the weather is finally warming up, one of the most crucial aspects I emphasise to my runners is the importance of staying hydrated before training runs. Proper hydration not only enhances performance but also ensures optimal health and safety during exercise.

Hydration Basics

Hydration is essential for maintaining bodily functions, especially during physical activity. Water regulates body temperature, lubricates joints, and transports nutrients, all vital for peak athletic performance. However, when it comes to pre-run hydration, there's more to consider than just drinking water.

Benefits of Isotonic Drinks Over Plain Water

While plain water is beneficial, isotonic drinks offer additional advantages for runners. Isotonic drinks contain electrolytes that closely match the body's natural fluid composition. Here's why they can be more effective:

Electrolyte Replenishment During intense exercise, and particularly during warm weather, the body loses electrolytes through sweat. Isotonic drinks replenish these essential minerals—such as sodium, potassium, and magnesium, helping you to sustain your effort, delay fatigue, prevent muscle cramps, and maintain fluid balance.

Enhanced Absorption The composition of isotonic drinks facilitates faster absorption of fluids compared to plain water, ensuring that the body stays hydrated more effectively.

Fluid Volume Guidelines

Pre-Hydration Start hydrating no less than 2-3 hours before the run. Aim to consume 500-600 ml (about 17-20 ounces) of fluid during this period.

Immediate Pre-Run Hydration About 15-30 minutes before starting the run, drink an additional 200-250 ml (about 7-8 ounces) of fluid. This can be either water or an isotonic drink, depending on the length and intensity of the run. **(N.B. Depending on what we're trying to achieve from the session, there may be no requirement for immediate pre-run hydration. All round general hydration, however, is essential).**

Balancing Fluids If opting for isotonic drinks, ensure they are consumed in moderation. Balancing plain water and isotonic drinks according to the

workout demands is key. Whilst not easy to achieve, over hydration with plain water can have a diluting effect on sodium levels, leading to hyponatremia. Conversely, over hydration via electrolytes can lead to having too much sodium in the blood, hypernatremia (this is also the same effect dehydration has), or too much potassium, hyperkalemia.

Conclusion

Staying hydrated before training runs is essential for runners to perform at their best and avoid dehydration-related issues. While plain water is a good start, incorporating isotonic drinks can offer superior hydration benefits by replenishing. By following the recommended hydration volumes, runners can ensure they are well-prepared for their runs, promoting both performance and overall health. As a coach, instilling these hydration habits in runners is a fundamental step towards their athletic success.

