

Feeling fresh through summer

It's that time of year again. As the sun begins to shine longer and harder, finding a way to not only quench your thirst but also keep hydrated is of ultimate importance.

When most people think hydration, they think they need to increase their water intake. For the average person this is true. However, for those that are highly active, especially in hot climates, the process of hydration is not just about giving the body back the water it has lost. It is also about replacing the lost electrolytes. This does not just mean those who are salty sweaters, where their skin has a cake of salt after exercise, there can be varied concentrations of electrolytes that need to be replaced. An individual who only consumes water in hot conditions during exercise is actually at risk of hyponatremia (where an excessive amount of water is consumed therefore reducing sodium levels in the cells).

If an athlete becomes dehydrated during exercise, they can experience impaired heat regulation, increased perception of effort, reduced mental function and most importantly reduced performance.

Judging your hydration status and what type of fluid as well as how much you need, can be difficult to assess. The basic principle during exercise is to consume the amount of fluids that will match sweat losses. An easy, convenient way to measure sweat loss is by weighing yourself before and after exercise. Each kilogram of weight loss indicates one litre of fluid loss. Once this amount is established, then add the amount of fluid consumed during the exercise session and this gives total fluid loss for the session.

When you know your sweat loss for different situations including environmental temperature, humidity and exercise session length, a plan can be prepared, so future exercise sessions or performance during matches will not be negatively affected by poor hydration.

Replacing the amount of fluid that is lost in sweat is one step in hydrating well. Choosing the best fluid to consume during exercise is the next step. The type of fluid to choose needs to contain electrolytes such as sodium and potassium. It also needs to be palatable and at your preferred temperature to encourage greater fluid intake. The fluid should be non-carbonated and possibly contain 6-8% carbohydrate if you need the extra fuel during exercise.

Given the nature of tennis, it could be your hydration status that keeps you going and sends your opponent to the sideline.

Meanwhile, for the rest of us watching sport, an ice-cold water finished off with a squeeze of lemon or some fresh mint leaves is hydrating enough to keep us cool and enjoy being a spectator during the summer heat.

By Joanne Shinewell – Tennis Australia Performance Nutritionist