

When to choose sports drinks over water

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(Medical Xpress) -- With all the different sports drinks on the market, it can be hard to decide whether to reach for a sports drink or water to quench your thirst. In most cases, water will meet your hydration needs, according to Brooke Schantz, a Loyola University Health System registered dietitian and certified specialist in sports dietetics.

“Sports drinks shouldn’t take the place of regular water intake,” Schantz said. “Yes, they will help hydrate you, but the average healthy child, adolescent and adult doesn’t need the extra carbohydrates and calories that come with consuming these sugary beverages.”

Schantz said there are certain cases when sports drinks are beneficial. Carbohydrates, our main energy source, can be found in sports drinks. Those who exercise for one hour or longer should consume between 30-60 grams of carbohydrates to help maintain blood sugar levels. Most [sports drinks](#) contain about 4-8 percent of carbohydrates to help meet those needs.

“Consuming these beverages during exercise that lasts more than one hour can aid in hydration and help provide needed energy to hard-working muscles,” Schantz said.

The following tips will help to alleviate confusion about what to drink and when to drink it.

When to choose [water](#):

- While sitting on the couch
- During a 3-mile run or bike ride
- While sitting at your desk studying or working

When to choose a sports drink:

- While participating in a sporting event or endurance race that lasts longer than one hour
- While exercising in extreme environments, such as in severe heat or humidity, the cold or at a high altitude
- If you are an athlete who has missed or not consumed a high quality, preworkout meal to sustain your physical activity
- If you are a wrestler or if you participate in another sport where you limit your energy intake prior to a weigh-in

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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