

SPORTS DRINKS

Why use sports drinks?

When you run you lose water and valuable nutrients. These include carbohydrates such as fructose and glucose, which are found in sports drinks. Glucose is the process that creates a molecule called ATP which is used for energy production by all cells in the body. Energy production is higher when running so more glucose is needed.

Sports drinks also contain electrolytes such as sodium and potassium. These are ions which work together to help with normal muscle contraction and so having balanced levels of them is essential for running. Sports drinks replenish carbohydrate and electrolyte levels, helping maintain your performance.

When and how much should they be taken?

The guidance on the use of sports drinks is quite vague but here are some rough guidelines:

Runs of less than one hour

Generally, a sports drink won't be needed as your body is likely to have adequate supplies of carbohydrates and electrolytes to replenish any lost itself.

Runs of more than one hour

If you are running for over an hour you are likely to need a sports drink to maintain a good performance. As a rough guide you should take 30-60g of carbohydrates per hour for runs of 1 to 2.5 hours, drunk gradually. Over 2.5 hours you should take up to 90g per hour. Any more than this is likely to make you feel ill and should be avoided.

One final point

Hydration is very specific to each individual and for this reason you should listen to your own body. In some situations, for example in high temperatures you may need more sports drinks than normal. Pay attention to your hydration levels as dehydration (and being overly hydrated) can be a serious problem requiring medical attention. If you have any concerns see a medical professional for help.