

# PREVENTING HEAT-RELATED ILLNESSES

According to the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Sports Medicine, all heat-related illnesses are preventable. Any athlete, in any sport, outdoor or indoor, can suffer from heat-related illnesses.



Football players are at increased risk of dehydration in part because of their equipment needs. Football gear is designed for protection, but the necessary padding does not allow for quick evaporation or cooling. It's not uncommon for players to lose anywhere between 5-15 pounds during a game or workout, especially during two-a-day practices.

In addition, a player's helmet substantially reduces the body's ability to release heat, thus increasing body temperature and the risk of heat illness.

Players that are dehydrated will

1. fatigue earlier,
2. lose coordination skills and
3. have a higher risk of heat exhaustion, heat illness or even heat stroke.

If a football player wants to maximize their athletic potential they should make sure that they are well hydrated throughout the game or practice.

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## DON'T WAIT UNTIL YOU'RE THIRSTY

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Thirst mechanisms don't kick in until a player has lost about 2% of his body weight as sweat. In other words, a player who weighs 250 pounds may lose 5 pounds before they even becomes thirsty. Unfortunately, this small amount of fluid loss can hurt performance skills and the player may be fatigued before they starts to drink!

Players often drink to quench their mouth thirst. If a player only drinks to quench their thirst they may be replacing only 1/2 to 2/3 of the fluids lost. As a result, they will start the next practice or workout in a state of dehydration. Football players need to drink throughout the day whether they are thirsty or not. Research shows that a sports drink containing 6% carbohydrate can be absorbed in the body as rapidly as water. But unlike water, a sports drink can provide energy to the working muscles, delay fatigue and improve performance.

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## FLUID INTAKE RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. Drinking cool beverages will encourage the player to drink more.
2. Players should have unlimited access to fluids (sports drinks and water) throughout the game or workout.
3. Drink 17-20 ounces (approximately 2-3 cups) of water or a sports drink, 2-3 hours before practices or games.
4. Drink another 7-10 ounces (a little over 1 cup) of water or a sports drink 10-20 minutes before practice or games
5. Players should drink during exercise to minimize losses in body weight but should not over drink.
6. Avoid carbonated drinks. They can cause bloating and may decrease the amount of fluid consumed.
7. Avoid caffeinated beverages as they cause the body to lose body fluids.

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## DO NOT USE SALT TABLETS

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Salt tablets contribute to further dehydration! Drinking a sports drink, lightly salting food, or eating foods higher in sodium, while getting used to the heat will adequately replace any sodium lost. Sports drinks, pretzels, tomato juice, soup and pickles all have sodium levels that will help replace lost sodium without contributing to further dehydration.