



MAFES Dawg Tracks

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Water vs. Sports Drinks

Water vs. Sports drinks is an issue that I like to repeat each year because I feel that new bodies may get exposed to this theory of water being more beneficial and cheaper cost-wise than buying the fancy sports drinks. I repeat this and the reasons to drink more water every year hoping that people understand that water is the better choice in normal conditions. Extreme work or exercise may warrant the sports drinks in those situations. However, the paper last week and this one offers good selling points on sticking with water.

Dr. Robert Roberge, a UNM exercise physiologist, has done extensive research on this subject. He wrote an article on the web page of the university's paper, www.dailylodo.com on the effects of water vs. sports drinks. His study ran from 1999 through 2004, researching Gatorade's claim that it is superior to water in the ability to hydrate the body. If the weights are the same, it is obvious that Gatorade isn't retained any better than water. The reason that Gatorade is thought to rehydrate better is because of the carbohydrates in the drinks, which aids the small intestine in absorbing water in the body. The body absorbs water 7 times faster with carbohydrates, but according to Dr. Roberge, there is no more evidence that the body is able to retain the water.

After the research where the subjects drank the water and the Gatorade, the subjects ran to the bathroom just as fast. The research showed that the Gatorade provides the athletes with carbohydrates needed during exercise, but unless a person is going to exercise strenuously 90 minutes, consuming carbohydrates is self-defeating. He said that there is no reason for people to ingest a drink that is basically water. You can make the same drink out of Kool-Aid and sugar and then add table salt. It is effectively the same as 1/5th of the cost of Gatorade.

Gatorade's Sport Science Institute's website states that water quenches the thirst, but it isn't an effective hydrator, because it prematurely satisfies thirst. The study showed that most people don't drink enough water during exercise, and the fluids in their bodies are constantly depleted during urination. The salt in Gatorade maintains their desire to keep drinking it. Dr. Roberge says that the same argument against water used by the company applies to sports drinks. The argument is valid for both water and Gatorade. Dr. Roberge surmises that (*exercise scientists*) are improving in integrity and science.

Mr. Peter Lui, representing the soko.com health and fitness link states that sweating is the body's mechanism for cooling down, which is triggered by heavy activity and heat. The higher sweat production occurs during exercise. As sweat rises to the skin, larger amounts of water, sodium chloride and potassium are brought to the surface. The loss of those electrolytes decreases athletic effectiveness, since the loss of sodium chloride and water dehydrates the body. The most important thing to know is the amount of sweat produced is equally proportionate to the amount of energy used up. It is when the body loses fluids that the debate between water and the sports drinks comes to the fore.

Other variations contain fewer carbohydrates, more vitamins, more electrolytes and caffeine. Both drinks boast that they can help the body to work harder and more effectively during exercise by replacing electrolytes as you lose them and enabling your body to drink more liquid. Drinking more liquids quickens rehydration. Gatorade claims that its drink does it better than water. The real truth is that sports drinks are more effective if you're planning to take part in an extreme exercise program for long periods of time, like triathlon or marathon runs.

WATER FACTS- Water contains minerals and electrolytes, as does Gatorade and PowerAde. However, water contains calcium, nitrates, sulphates, and zinc, in addition to electrolytes. One of the selling points of sports drinks is that they have against water is that water has no taste. Sugar and flavoring added to sports drinks increases their appeal. They also boast that people tire of drinking water because of the lack of taste. Water does not contain the calories of sports drinks. This may be the reason why they released newer versions with fewer calories.

FITNESS WATER- Gatorade released its line of "Propel" fitness water in 2000. It has the same ingredients as Gatorade but also includes more vitamins and fewer calories. The selling points are the same as Gatorade. The lightly flavor water is supposed to make you drink more, while helping you to stay active. The fact is that water does the same thing.

THE VERDICT- While Gatorade, PowerAde, Propel, and all other off-shoots boast superiority to water in some way or other, drinks that contain electrolytes are only at their most effective during extended periods of intensive exercise. Water is a much better substitute for normal periods of exercise. If you normally exercise for a period of an hour or more you can easily replenish and rehydrate your muscles with water. If your body mostly contains water in the first place, why replace the water with some foreign liquid.

KNOWING IS HALF THE BATTLE- Athletes and workers will have their own preferences as to what they want to drink while they exercise or work, and the debate of which is better will continue. It's just best to know the facts, no matter which drink you like better. The University of California's San Francisco Department of Nutrition's website (www.uest.edu/st.share.nutrition) answers the question. Isn't Gatorade the best drink for playing sports and quenching thirst? **NO!** Gatorade is not as bad as other drinks like soda, but when you are playing sports, water is probably the best. Gatorade has sugar in it, which makes it harder for your body to absorb the fluid you need while playing sports. But, as long as you have a healthy diet and aren't running marathons, water will provide the needed electrolytes and is probably your best option. All the articles that I have read use sports and exercise for their research comparisons. Normal field work compares close to agricultural work and exercise.

You can read any number of articles on sports drinks vs. water and you will, like me, -not knowing which to favor.