

## **Is Your Athlete Drinking Enough? 7 Things Sports Parents Need to Know**

**By David Benzel**



Summer is upon us. And with it comes hot and humid days.

If proper hydration for your athlete is not HIGH on your radar, then dehydration is a strong possibility.

In fact, [Dr. Susan Yeargin](#) – an expert at the University of South Carolina – conducted research on this topic and found out something that every youth sports coach and parent needs to know.

**Up to 75% of young athletes go to practice ALREADY dehydrated.**

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The most effective way to prevent this is vigilance on the part of parents, coaches, and athletes – to be purposeful about hydrating.

Here are 7 areas to understand, when it comes to keeping young athletes safe and hydrated.

## 1) Dangers of Dehydration

It doesn't take much for an athlete to be negatively impacted by a lack of needed fluid.

In fact, dehydration can be as little as losing 2% of body weight in sweat – and it WILL impair performance. To put it into perspective, that is less than a pound and a half for the average 10-year-old athlete.

To understand why it hinders sports participation, it is important to appreciate what is going on internally when we don't hydrate enough:

- We sweat less
- Our body is not able to dissipate heat as well
- Our core temperature goes up
- Skin's blood flow decreases
- More stored energy is used up
- Blood volume is reduced

If left unchecked, dehydration can lead to heat exhaustion and heat stroke – both of which can become very dangerous.

Because kids are 65% water, as compared to the average adult who is 57-60% water, young athletes are more at risk for being under-hydrated.

## 2) Symptoms to Watch For

How many times has a parent or coach heard, "But I'm not thirsty."

Unfortunately, it is true that thirst kicks in when the body is **already** under-hydrated. Thankfully though it is an EARLY warning sign and there are other indications that help parents, coaches, or athletes to know if they are not drinking enough.

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Watch for these symptoms and teach your athlete to report to you whenever they are experiencing any of them:

- Irritability
- Thirst
- Headache
- Dry or sticky mouth
- Feeling dizzy or lightheaded
- Muscle cramps
- Overly tired
- Nausea
- Inability to perform normal skills or keep usual pace
- Not interested in the game or practice

Respond to these symptoms immediately with needed fluids.

### 3) Risk Factors for Athletes



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Since prevention is the name-of-the-game, knowing the risk factors is key. Remember that all of these affect kids **quicker** than healthy adults:

- Hot and humid weather
- Not drinking enough prior to an event
- Activity midday when it is hottest
- A lack of access to fluids during a practice or game
- Being overweight
- Sweating profusely
- Not following up with fluids after sports participation
- Being on some medications
- Being in the sun for extended periods
- Not enough water breaks

If your athlete is facing any 1 (or a combination) of these conditions then they are at risk of becoming dehydrated.

## 4) How to Monitor Hydration

Other than noticing the symptoms mentioned above there are a few other ways to determine if your child is taking in enough fluids.

Ask them to **rate their thirstiness** on a scale of 1 - 9, with 1 feeling no thirst at all and 9 being super thirsty. If they rate it with any number above a 3 then the research has shown they are probably already 1-2% dehydrated. Remember that “feeling thirsty” does not usually kick in till after dehydration has already started.

For younger athletes **check the color of their urine**. Older athletes can be taught to check their own. If urine is the color of a diluted lemonade then they are probably taking in enough fluids. However, if urine is bright yellow or orange or brown then they are definitely dehydrated and need to start drinking ASAP.

Finally, another simple way to track hydration is to do a **weigh-in before and after competition (or practice.)** For every pound that is lost, your child will need to drink 16 ounces of fluid to replenish sufficiently.

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## 5) Before

Hot, sticky weather will put hydration on your radar but paying attention to fluid intake in the normal day-to-day is particularly important for athletes performing in the heat.

**Since the research has shown that most kids will head into a game already dehydrated, it is imperative to pay attention to hydration during the days leading up to an event.**

Simply put, staying hydrated requires a continuous effort.

On the day of a workout, be sure that your athlete drinks one to two cups of water an hour before starting.

## 6) During

The obvious time to drink for most athletes is during a workout or game. However, it is not quite as obvious **how much** should be consumed during that time.

According to the [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) children weighing under 90 lbs should have a water break every 20 minutes during outdoor (or strenuous) activity. They should be encouraged to drink ½ cup to 1 cup each break.

Older kids, weighing 90 plus should have 2-3 drinking breaks and aim to consume 5-6 cups during that time.

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Parents, make sure you send plenty of fluid with your child to practices and competitions.

Coaches, stay focused on giving your athletes sufficient time to replenish.

## **7) After**

The 1-2 hour window after exertion is the primary time to focus on recovering lost fluids.

Aim to drink at least 16 ounces in the few hours after the workout. However, if you have signs of being dehydrated then consume more.

Remember that avoiding dehydration during a game, involves paying attention to your fluid intake when you're off the field.

## **Peak Performance**

Lagging endurance, inability to stay focused, and difficulty performing normal skills are all ways that performance can be impacted when an athlete is even mildly dehydrated.

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Keeping young athletes hydrated throughout the whole year – but particularly during the hot summer months – requires purposeful effort on the part of coaches, parents, and athletes.

Follow these guidelines to set your athletes up for peak performance.

**David Benzel** is the Founder and Executive Director of [Growing Champions for Life, Inc.](http://www.growingchampionsforlife.com), which provides parents and coaches with practical tools & positive strategies for helping athletes reach their full potential while enjoying the youth sport experience. David is also the author of *"From Chump to Champ - How Individuals Go From Good to Great"* [www.growingchampionsforlife.com](http://www.growingchampionsforlife.com)