

## *Choosing the Right Sports Drink*

If you're planning on running a spring or summer race, you're probably thinking about using a sports drink as part of your training. Are sports drinks all hype and marketing? The simple answer is that sports drinks can be beneficial, both in training and in competition. Here are some guidelines for choosing, and using, the best sports drinks.

### **WHO should use a sports drink?**

For the most part, sports drinks are most beneficial during endurance activities, such as running, cycling, soccer, hockey, etc. Sports drinks can provide extra benefit when an athlete has a high sweat rate, or the weather is hot. They are not useful when watching TV, at work, etc., however, as they simply add unnecessary extra calories to the diet, with little nutritional value.

### **WHY should I use a sports drink?**

Sports drinks can help replace carbohydrates, fluids, and electrolytes (salts), all of which are lost or burned during intense activity. The carbohydrates can help prevent "bonking" (fatigue), which typically occurs in activities lasting more than 2 hours (like a marathon), or when completing multiple activities in the same day (e.g. a soccer tournament), while the fluids can prevent dehydration, and the electrolytes can help prevent cramping.

### **WHAT sports drinks are best?**

As a rule, sports drinks with about 5-6% carbohydrates (meaning 5-6 g of carbs per 100 ml), such as Gatorade or E-Load, typically result in a greater improvement in endurance, a lower heart rate, and lower perceived exertion versus other sports drinks, or water alone. While both also contain electrolytes, E-Load's higher concentration of salts may be more useful for those who are prone to cramping, or participating in ultra-endurance activities (e.g. an Ironman).

### **WHEN and WHERE should I use a sports drink?**

If the weather is very hot, or you are already dehydrated, you can start using a sports drink right away. However, the usual rule is to start the sports drink after the first 45 minutes to 1 hour of activity, and continue until you are finished. Try carrying your sports drink in a water belt, or leave a few different bottles strategically placed along your course or the sidelines of your practice or game. And always remember that you should try any sports drink out in training before using it in competition.

### **HOW much should I drink?**

As a rule, athletes should try to consume 500 ml-1 L (2-4 cups) of fluid per hour, and a sports drink can make up part (or all) of that total.