

Play Your Best with Proper Hydration

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IMPROVING YOUR HYDRATION STATUS

At some point, we have all heard, "Drink lots of water!" Even as the weather gets cooler and the Southeast settles into the mild months of Autumn, competitive tennis players may still encounter a high heat index and hot court surfaces. These conditions make tennis players targets for dehydration and heat illness. Water is good for us, but too much actually dilutes our body's sodium to levels low enough to increase health problems such as muscle cramping. So, what is adequate hydration?

Target a 10- to 12-cup training diet base daily, either of water or equivalent hydrating beverages. Which beverages are best, and how do they fit into our overall eating plan? Here are some answers.

The tennis training diet should be focused on high-energy foods and proper hydration, timed appropriately before and after multiple competitions. The following guidelines help develop successful nutrition and hydration practices for players.

Beverages and foods that count toward daily water intake:

- **Best:** water, fitness waters, sport beverages, club soda, mineral water, flavored water
- **Very good:** 100 percent fruit juices, lemonade, tomato and vegetable juices,

low fat/skim milk, natural smoothies

- **Good:** raw fruits and vegetables
- **So-so:** soft drinks (diet soft drinks in moderation), decaffeinated coffee, yogurt
- **Not so helpful:** caffeinated beverages (coffee, tea, soda) and alcoholic beverages act as diuretics and do not count toward water intake

PRE-MATCH EATING AND HYDRATION GUIDELINES

Tennis players need to pay special attention to pre-match meal and beverage choices, as these foods and fluids may need to last for hours during longer match play.

Select pre-match meals and beverages that are:

- Familiar and known to settle hunger.
- High in carbohydrate to supply energy for muscle reserves, moderate in protein, and low in fat.
- Quickly and comfortably digested (not too high in fiber or fat); beware that some smoothies and higher protein sports drinks may be too heavy in your gastrointestinal tract before matches.

Examples of pre-match meals and beverages rich in carbohydrate and fluids are pasta, sandwiches, fresh fruit, granola bars, higher carbohydrate energy bars, sports drinks and fitness waters.

Hydration tips before you hit the court:

- Limit/avoid caffeinated beverages

(iced tea, coffee, cola), especially right before and after match play. These do not hydrate well and act as diuretics.

■ The night before playing, fill and chill squeeze bottles or sports jugs and bring them to each practice and match. Have a minimum of two liters available court-side.

■ Consume enough fluids throughout the day so urine is a light or pale yellow color before starting a match.

■ Drink 17 to 20 oz. of fluid within two hours pre-match and as close to match time as you can tolerate (for example, on the way to your match).

FLUID NEEDS DURING PLAY

Thirst is not an accurate indicator of hydration level. Adequate fluid consumption is a player's best bet for beating dehydration and heat illness. To keep performing at your best, drink 7 to 10 oz. of fluid every 10 to 15 minutes and/or every changeover. Never miss an opportunity to drink at a changeover!

Drink favored sports drinks to enhance rehydration. Sports drinks contain carbohydrate and electrolytes, like sodium. Consuming carbohydrate during play has been shown to help players maintain more power and accuracy in serving and groundstrokes in long match play. For example, Gatorade contains 14 grams carbohydrate per 8 oz., which is quickly



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absorbed and used by working muscles. Sodium replacement is also important since a significant amount of sodium can be lost through sweat during long tennis matches. Recent research also shows that tennis players can lose a great deal of sodium during long match play in the heat, some male players losing up to 2 grams of sodium in a single match!

POST-MATCH NUTRITION

Eat foods and drink fluids that replenish muscle energy stores and electrolytes lost in competition. Here are some guidelines to follow:

- Eat or drink carbohydrates as soon as possible, preferably within the first 30 minutes of a match. Begin by drinking a sports drink or fitness water as you walk off the court.

- Replace 150 percent of body weight lost in sweat, or at least 20 oz. per pound of sweat weight loss, within two hours of a match. A simple way to keep track is to check your body weight both before and after a match to note the body weight change.

- Eat a high-carbohydrate meal that also contains a lean protein source within two hours after play to maximize muscle glycogen recovery (rebuild energy stores) and to support protein synthesis in muscle. A fruit smoothie with protein powder or a sports meal replacement shake can provide this plus provide some additional hydration.

- Also consider lightly salting foods and consuming beverages that are natural sodium sources such as tomato juice.

As you play long tennis matches in intense heat, remember to hydrate and fuel your body appropriately to stay well conditioned. When you follow these guidelines, you will serve up a powerful match to any opponent. Best of luck with this summer season!

For more information about nutrition for athletes, visit the author's website at nutrifitga.com.

TOP 10 WAYS TO ENHANCE ON-COURT HYDRATION

- 1) Drink 1 to 2 cups of water-based beverages (water, juice, milk) with every meal and snack. Target a 10- to 12-cup base minimum of these hydrating beverages per day.
- 2) If you consume caffeinated beverages, alternate non-caffeinated beverages between caffeinated beverages throughout the day.
- 3) Limit caffeinated beverage intake after a certain time of day (for example, 1 p.m.).
- 4) Set a reasonable limit on coffee intake (for instance, 1 to 2 cups per day).
- 5) Substitute decaffeinated tea, soda or coffee for some of your caffeinated drinks.
- 6) Increase water-based food sources and better meet your training diet food group needs by increasing vegetable/fruit juice and milk consumption (2 cups of vegetable/fruit juice = minimum 4 vegetables or fruit servings per day; 2 cups milk = minimum dairy intake per day).
- 7) Try calorie-free fruit flavored waters such as Schweppes or Fruit₂O.
- 8) Dilute juices with water.
- 9) If you drink alcohol, consider alternating plain club soda with alcoholic beverages.
- 10) Keep a water bottle with you at all times (freeze overnight so it stays cool on hot summer days).