



## The Battle Of the Beverages

Sip or skip? How to find the right sports drink.

BY ALYSSA SHAFFER

**T**here was a time when water was the ultimate sports drink. Today shelves are packed with dozens of options for athletes looking to stay hydrated and improve power, speed and energy. Which ones can make you a winner and which are a waste of money and calories? Here's our guide to the most popular sports beverages and how they can help, or hurt, your game. Regardless of which you choose, the USTA recommends that, in addition to eight 8-ounce glasses of fluids on a regular day, you drink 16–20 ounces within two hours before you hit the court and 4–8 ounces on each changeover.



### Traditional Sport Drinks

**Think:** Cytomax, Gatorade

**When to sip:** Most of us have had a classic sports drink at some point. Many experts say that it's a good option from a performance point of view. "A traditional sports drink has all

the necessary elements: water for hydration, carbs for energy, and electrolytes, especially sodium, lost during sweat," says Michael Bergeron, Ph.D., a consultant for the WTA tour and director of the National Institute for Athletic Health & Performance and Center for Youth Sports & Health in Sioux Falls, S.D.

Studies have shown that consuming a sports beverage containing 6–8 percent carbs increases speed and endurance. Other research has demonstrated that having sodium during play helps you stay hydrated, so you're not as likely to cramp on court. That's especially important if you're playing in a tournament, since you have less time to rehydrate between matches.

"At match time, most of the professionals will use a sports beverage," says Page Love, M.S., R.D., head of Nutrifit Sport Therapy

**"These are called sport drinks because you're only supposed to drink them when you're active," says Susan Kleiner, Ph.D., R.D.**



Inc. in Atlanta and a consultant for the USTA. "They need the quick energy source to help get through that third or fifth set."

**When to skip:** The average recreational player doesn't put himself through the same rigors as Roger Federer or Serena Williams. That means drinking Gatorade off court can be a waste of cash and calories. "These are called sport drinks because you're only supposed to drink them when you're active," says Susan Kleiner, Ph.D., R.D., owner of High Performance Nutrition in Mercer Island, Wash. "You should use those calories when your body knows what to do with them." You could gain up to 10 pounds if you consume 16 ounces, or 100 calories, of Gatorade each day for a year. Another negative is that a sports drink's unique mix of sugar, acidic content and other additives can erode and stain tooth enamel even more than soda.



### Low-Cal Sports Drinks/ Flavored Waters

**Think:** EmergenC, Powerade Zero, Propel, Ultima Replenisher

**When to sip:** Calorie-conscious players have probably noticed new products concocted to replenish vitamins, minerals and other nutrients without adding to their waistlines. Some are designed solely to replace electrolytes like sodium and potassium; others use artificial sweeteners and flavors to make them tastier. For the most part, nutritionists say, lower-calorie options work for short workouts of an hour or less, or to keep you hydrated throughout the day. "A lot of the female pros use these drinks off the court or in practice because they're a good source of fluids, especially if they don't like the taste of plain water," Love says.

The added sodium can be especially important if you're a "salty sweater" and often have a salty residue on your skin or clothes after working out. "Some people need to replace those lost electrolytes without necessarily adding extra calories," Kleiner says.

**When to skip:** If you're playing in hot conditions or you're on court for more than

an hour, your muscles need a new energy source in the form of fast-digesting carbs, which means calories. "These fitness waters may not be enough for competitive players in three-set situations when their engines are starting to run out of fuel," Love says.

Also, keep in mind that the electrolyte to look for is sodium. "You'll get most of the other minerals, like potassium, magnesium and calcium, in your diet," Bergeron says.



### Energy Drinks

**Think:** Red Bull, Rockstar

**When to sip:** More than just a late-night study aid or party boost, energy drinks have made their way into sports. Many are loaded with sugar and caffeine, as well as herbs

like ginseng and yerba mate. Research has shown that these drinks can increase both muscular and aerobic endurance.

**When to skip:** For the most part, experts tend to steer players away from energy drinks. Bergeron says that while they do enhance physical performance, "there's a lot of negative things that can also go with these drinks." Too much caffeine, for example, can make you jittery and hurt your game (not to mention your stomach). "I'd rather see tennis players get their energy from eating right and resting well," he says.



### Mineral or Plain Water

**Think:** Evian, San Pellegrino, tap water

**When to sip:** Water is the cheapest and easiest thing to drink. It helps transport glucose, oxygen and fats to working muscles

and carries away byproducts such as carbon dioxide and lactic acid. When you exercise, water regulates body temperature by absorbing heat from the muscles and dissipating it in the form of sweat.

**When to skip:** If you drink gallons each day, it's possible to overhydrate with water, which can dilute levels of sodium in the bloodstream. To prevent this, some experts recommend mineral water, which contains a small amount of electrolytes. "You'll still be getting some sodium into your system, but you won't have all the calories or artificial taste associated with sports drinks," says Dr. Seth Feltheimer, an internist at New York Presbyterian Hospital at Columbia University. Other experts say there's not enough sodium in mineral water to make a difference. When in doubt, Bergeron says, start slowly. "You can always begin a match with water and switch to a sports drink or other beverage with carbs and electrolytes if you're playing for more than an hour, or if it's excessively hot or humid." ●