



Introduction to Coaching Youth Sports

Hydration



Hydration is an important safety issue for athletes and coaches alike. One reason is because when athletes are training, when they're practicing hard, they're losing a lot of water and sweat, probably more that they're replacing what they drink.



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Coaches may not feel as de-hydrated as their young athletes when they're on the field. We know from research that young athletes actually become de-hydrated more easily than adults. Dehydration can lead to heat illnesses like heat exhaustion and heat stroke. These can be life-threatening illnesses. Every year many young athletes go to the emergency room with heat illness.

We can certainly prevent de-hydration by helping our athletes drink before during and after they have activity. It's very important that athletes come to a practice already hydrated, so we need to teach them to be hydrated before they get there, to drink during the day. Certainly we want to have plenty of fluids available at the practice so athletes have lots of opportunities to drink. Ideally, every 15 to 20 minutes coaches should stop a practice and let an athlete have an opportunity to drink.



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Coaches can do some important things to enforce a hydration message. They can certainly make sure that there is fluid available at every practice. Often coaches will think that it is important to have fluid available at the games or competitions but they really need to think day by day to have fluids available at every practice and every workout. Certainly water's important and we also want to have sports drinks available, because that way athletes can re-hydrate with water and sports drinks as well.

If they drink fluids like Gatorade, which have electrolytes, they can also replace the electrolytes they lose in sweat. Afterwards, an athlete ideally wants to replace what they lost in sweat. Drinking and continuing to drink until the athlete is going to the bathroom frequently is an important thing to do.

If they also tend to look at an athlete and they're sweating and can see some white crust on the skin or on the clothes, they know that athlete might be losing an excess amount of sodium. That's generally salt they're losing or sodium. And so you want to look to replace the fluids that are lost with something, a sport drink that has electrolytes in it and carbohydrate for energy.

We find that athletes tend to drink more, particularly young athletes, they tend to drink more fluids that have flavor, that taste good to them. So looking for that flavor encourages more fluid intake, which certainly helps maintain hydration.

If you can't provide fluids for your team, remind parents to always pack a sports bottle or a squeeze bottle and make sure athletes have those available during practices and games.

It's a great idea for coaches to require a squeeze bottle just along with any other safety equipment. Maybe they've got shin guards or maybe they've got a helmet, a squeeze bottle can be right along those lines so that athletes know that it's just as important as everything else they do.

One thing you can do coaches is teach your athletes that asking for a drink does not make them weak. In fact it enhances their performance.

We want athletes to want to hydrate and re-hydrate. Never restrict fluids as a punishment.