

## Coach limits water during practice — Help! <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

I have a question about dehydration. I am an eighteen-year-old female and play on a varsity basketball team. We usually have two-hour practices in which we work very hard. Our coach does not give us water breaks, and usually by the end of practice, we have cottonmouth and are "dying" for water. It is horrible. Is there any way that not having water during that time can be dangerous? Sometimes the team can feel sick or weak by the end of a practice.

Thirsty one

### Answer

Dear Thirsty one,

While your coach may think they're training you for a tough game, there's more risk than discipline in withholding hydration. Perhaps your coach thinks that drinking water during practice will cause cramps and impair performance, or maybe they don't want to take time away from practice by having water breaks. No matter their reasons, being adequately hydrated is crucial not only for high performance, but for health in general. By the time you're thirsty, your body likely already needs fluids, so yes, to answer your question, this may be putting all of you at risk.

Water is vital to life for many reasons. Adult bodies are made up of about 55 to 60 percent water, and child and adolescent bodies have an even higher percentage. This fluid is needed to:

- Transport nutrients to organs and muscles.
- Carry waste products out of the body.
- Protects organs and tissues.
- Keeps tissues moist.
- Act as a lubricant around joints.
- Work as a shock absorber inside the eyes and spinal cord.
- Serve as the solvent for minerals, vitamins, amino acids, glucose, and lots of other substances.
- Help regulate body temperature.

In carrying out daily normal body processes, adult human beings lose about 2.5 quarts of water. That's why health care professionals recommend drinking at least eight cups (one cup equals eight ounces) of water every day. People may require more fluid if they're physically active, especially when considering level of sweat. Other factors [2] that may determine how much fluid is lost (and therefore how much fluid to replenish) are: air temperature, intensity of the workout, body size, gender, length of the workout, and the body's overall fitness. Any non-caffeinated beverage will contribute to the hydration needed. Correctly hydrating before, during, and after physical activity [3] will ensure that your brain and body are working at their peak performance levels. The American Council on Exercise [4] (ACE) recommends drinking:

- Seventeen to 20 ounces of water two to three hours before you start physical activity
- Eight ounces of water 20 to 30 minutes before you start physical activity or during your warm-up
- Seven to ten ounces of water every 10 to 20 minutes during physical activity
- Eight ounces of water no more than 30 minutes after you're physically active

Thirsty one, you may consider keeping an eye out for signs of dehydration. You mentioned thirst, an early sign of dehydration, but some other early signs to watch out for are flushed skin, premature fatigue, increased body temperature, faster breathing and pulse rate, increased perception of effort, and decreased exercise capacity. Weakness, which you also mentioned, is a later sign of dehydration, as are dizziness and labored breathing. By the time you or your teammates notice these signs, you're likely already starting to experience the effects of dehydration, so taking the time to replenish lost fluids may not only increase performance but help you feel better as well.

If you feel comfortable doing so, you may consider bringing this data to your coach, as well as recounting your personal experiences during practice. Remember that your coach has their reasons for this course of action, so approaching the conversation with respect and doing so in private may be to your advantage. In fact, they may not be aware that access to water is restricted or be doing this intentionally. If you aren't comfortable approaching your coach or you and your teammates are still denied the water you need and deserve after speaking with your coach, you may consider enlisting the help of other authority figures, such as your parents, teachers, athletic director, or school health care professional, about your coach's philosophy, since dehydration is hazardous to your health. They may be able to speak with your coach and insist that water or other sports drinks be available to you and your teammates during practice to help you hydrate and keep you healthy. Keep in mind that there have been athlete deaths due to heatstroke and sudden cardiac arrest, and in many of these cases dehydration was a contributing factor, so what you're asking of your coach isn't unreasonable. If you're worried about retaliation from your coach, you may ask the authority figure to keep the complaint anonymous, but in this situation especially, the benefits of you or an authority figure speaking with your coach could outweigh the costs, since dehydration may lead to poor performance, disability, or even death.

Here's to health, happiness, and hydration!

Alice!

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## Related questions

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[Does caffeine affect athletic performance?](#) [9]

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### Links

[1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/coach-limits-water-during-practice-%E2%80%94-help>

[2] <https://www.eatright.org/fitness/sports-and-performance/hydrate-right/hydrate-right>

[3] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/what-to-drink-before-during-after-physical-activity>

[4] <https://www.acefitness.org/education-and-resources/lifestyle/blog/6675/healthy-hydration>

[5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/nutrition-physical-activity>

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[11] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-morningside>

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