Training Tip #18
Fluids

Recent scientific research has underscored the benefit of remaining well hydrated before, during and following physical activity. Hyponatremia (low sodium) is a rare but serious condition that can cause weakness, cramps, swollen hands and feet, confusion, and even seizures. To decrease your risk of hyponatremia you must replace fluids lost through exercise and consume food with salt. Maintaining fluid balance takes a concerted effort on your part in modifying your drinking behavior throughout your training day. The goal for fluid intake during exercise should be to fully replace fluids and salt lost through sweating. The physiological and performance benefits of doing so are well documented.

The best way to estimate the amount of fluid you are losing through sweating is to weigh yourself before and after exercise. You should drink at least one pint (2 glasses or 16 ounces) of fluid for every pound of weight lost due to sweating. If you weigh more after your training session, you may have drank too much fluid. Another way to estimate your hydration status is to monitor your urine output in terms of frequency and color. If you are urinating a small amount of dark-colored urine, then you need to increase your fluid intake.

Rapid and complete rehydration following exercise requires the consumption of a volume of fluid and salt that is equal to that which was lost as sweat. The fluids that taste good and have some amount of salt in them tend to be consumed more rapidly. It has been shown that athletes who include a cold sports drink during their activity will drink more fluid. Eating foods that contain salt decreases your risk of over diluting your fluids. Your fluid replacement needs may vary based on the weather conditions, terrain and your training level. Drinking when you are thirsty is the scientifically supported method to use which takes this into account. However, for participants who may find it easier, here are some fluid replacement guidelines to follow under normal conditions:

Pre-training walk/Pre-event:

- Drink an extra 8 glasses (64 ounces or 2 quarts) of fluid during the 24 hours before a long training walk or the event.
- Drink 2 glasses (16 ounces or 1 pint) of fluid 2 hours before exercise. This will allow time to excrete the excess fluid prior to walking.
- Remember, in hot or humid weather you may need to drink more fluids.
- If you are walking at a slower pace, you may not need to drink as much.

During your walk: Monitor your fluid intake. Drink when thirsty. Your urine should be dilute and you should be urinating frequently. Try to consume 4 to 5 ounces of fluid per mile (1 to 2 standard-sized water bottles per hour). This should include water and sports drink.

Post Walk: Drink a combination of water and sports drink and consume food with some salt after exercising more than 1 hour.