

## Hydration — what's the best drink for your work out routine: Gym Rat

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It should be simple: exercise, sweat, drink. But with so many different studies and expert opinions out there, something as natural as drinking can suddenly seem very, very complicated.

There's been some debate recently over when, <sup>chocolate milk</sup> how much — and more importantly, what — to drink while working out.

For the average person, it's best to stick to the basics, says Elizabeth Mansfield, a registered dietitian and exercise physiologist at Peak Performance, a health and sports clinic in Ottawa.

Unless they're training hard and long, or in extreme heat, most people will be fine sipping whenever they feel thirsty, she says.

That might not be enough for kids and seniors, two groups who "don't have the best thirst mechanism," Mansfield warns. They should make an effort to drink regularly during exercise, even if they don't feel parched, she says.

Drink options have multiplied in recent years, from one or two neon-coloured liquids to at least half a dozen varieties, each promising to leave drinkers refreshed and refuelled.

But water is still king, no matter what other drinks are in style, Mansfield says. Unless people are willing to train like athletes, they shouldn't drink like them, she adds.

Here's how to cut through the hype.



## **Water**

“Water is the perfect thing for hydration,” Mansfield says. It’s cheap, readily available and the best bet for any standard fitness routine, she says. Calorie- and sugar-free, it won’t cancel out the energy burned during a workout. But for sweat sessions that stretch longer than 90 minutes, water may not do the trick, she says. Past a certain threshold, the body needs a top-up of carbohydrates and electrolytes — minerals such as sodium and potassium that help regulate function in the muscles, brain and nervous system, among others.

## **Vitamin water**

It’s like water, but much more expensive, Mansfield says. Plus those vitamins won’t help anyone recover from a lung-busting sprint or weightlifting session.

## **Sports drinks**

These brightly coloured beverages are generally made of a solution of about 7 per cent carbohydrates — added fuel during a strenuous workout. They also contain electrolytes, which the body loses through sweat. But sports drinks are overkill for most people, who don’t exercise hard or long enough to warrant the extra boost, Mansfield says. And if weight loss is a goal, pounding back calorie-packed sports drinks could actually sabotage those efforts, she says.

## **Fruit juice**

Sure, it’s full of vitamins, but juice isn’t a good choice for mid-exercise hydration, Mansfield says. Because it’s predominantly fructose, a natural sugar that’s slowly absorbed by the body, juice sits longer in the stomach. Bottom line? “It can cause gut distress,” she says, the last thing anyone wants during a workout. Those set on chugging orange juice would do well to dilute it: Mansfield recommends one part juice to four parts water.

## **Energy drinks**

Pumped with caffeine and other supplements, these aggressively named drinks might trigger an immediate spike in energy, but they won’t provide any fitness advantage, Mansfield says. And the sugar they’re laced with — high-fructose corn syrup — is likely to cause “a gut-knot feeling in the stomach,” she says. Soccer parents take note: that strong a stimulant is “not suitable for kids at all,” she says.

## **Coconut water**

A top pick for natural-foods fans, coconut water contains electrolytes and has about as many calories as sports drinks. It has fewer carbs, though — a 3 per cent solution, Mansfield says. But it’s costly and doesn’t keep long, she says. And again, few people need the extra calories.

## **Milk or chocolate milk**

The white stuff and its chocolate cousin have gotten lots of love in fitness circles since a study last summer

suggested it was the best at rehydrating active kids. (Note: The study had a small sample size and was funded by the Dairy Farmers of Canada.) Milk's protein content definitely speeds up recovery between tough workouts, great for those who train twice a day, Mansfield says. "It's good for hard-working athletes, but how many people are those?" she says. In most cases, "the extra calories are unnecessary," particularly when you factor in the sugar in chocolate milk.

**Paola Loriggio** is a journalist in Toronto. She owns more workout clothes than real ones. Gym Rat runs twice a month.