



Children Need More Water When Playing in the Heat

With summer approaching, it is important to remember that children become dehydrated very quickly when playing in the heat. Children don't tolerate heat as well as adults because their bodies generate more heat relative to their size than adults do. They are also not as quick to adjust to changes in temperatures that summer brings. Plus, children have more skin surface relative to their body size which means they lose more water through evaporation from the skin.

Adults need to encourage children to drink water when playing in the heat. Kids tend to forget to drink when they are playing and need to be reminded. They usually don't instinctively drink enough fluid to replace what their body loses. Muscle work of any kind causes the body to lose water through sweat. This is true even when swimming or playing in other cool environments.

Dehydration is a very serious condition, especially in small children. Watch for signs such as decreased frequency of urination, dark urine, and coated tongue.

Signs of more severe dehydration include sunken eyes, nausea, muscle cramps and pain, clammy skin and a throbbing heart. If the child has any of these symptoms, seek advice from a physician immediately.

Advice for kids in active play, especially in the heat include:

- Drink a couple of glasses of cold water 1-2 hours before the activity and another cup 10-15 minutes before.
- Take water breaks every 15 minutes during activity to drink at least 1/2 cup of water.
- Plain cold water is absorbed most quickly by the body.
- Each child should have their own personalized water bottle.
- Flavored drinks may be acceptable to children and they are okay if they don't contain too much sugar (no more than 15-18 grams of carbohydrate per 8 ounces-check the label). Powdered lemonade mixed to half strength is well-accepted by children.
- Carbonated soft drinks may cause stomach upset because of the bubbles.
- Iced tea and soft drinks with caffeine provide less fluid because of their diuretic effect.
- Weigh kids before and after long play or sports activities. Each pound lost should be replaced by drinking two cups of fluid.

Water loss can be a life threatening problem for young children. It can't be taken too seriously. Dehydration can usually be prevented if parents, care-givers, or coaches follow these guidelines. Then let the children play!

Source: *Play Hard Eat Right- A Parent's Guide to Sports Nutrition*. Jennings, DS and Steen, SN. Chronimed for Children. 1995.

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