How best to hydrate your sporty kid

Saturday morning at my home this past weekend. Three sets of misplaced shin guards. Three new coaches to remember. Three kids running in different directions. And nearly forgotten as we fly out the door… three water bottles. Forget the balls, forget the money for pictures, even forget the coaches' names. But even in this beautiful cool autumn air, don't forget the water bottles to help hydrate your kid.

We are all accustomed to reminding our children to hydrate well during summer sports, but when the weather grows cooler we sometimes let our guard down. Because thirst does not always correlate with dehydration, children often misjudge their own hydration status. Teach your children to recognize headache and nausea as one of the first symptoms of dehydration. If they "just don't feel right ," take a break.

Don't depend on the coach. Learn to recognize when your child needs to rest and hydrate. A mother I met at field hockey Saturday says she can always tell if one of her girls needs a break because a subtle white ring appears around her mouth.

For hydration outside of sports, the best liquids for kids over two years old are skim milk and water. Reserve juice for constipated children or the picky eater who will not eat fruit. Even then, limit juice to once a day. Consumption of sweet beverages multiple times a day encourages a sweet tooth and gives only empty calories. Also, even juice diluted with water has the power to decay teeth- just ask my nephew who had over ten cavities filled two days ago.

Drink water up to half an hour prior to a sports activity. For young children who only play for an hour or so, water is a good choice for hydration. Enforce drinking approximately

every 20 minutes. For the more competitive players who churn up a sweat, electrolyte replenishers such as Gatorade and Powerade become important. After 20-30 minutes of sweating, a body can lose salt and sugar. At that point, switch to rehydration with electrolyte replenishers. My sister, an Emergency Medicine doctor, tells the story of a young woman played ultimate frisbee all day, and lost a large amount of salt through sweating. Because she also drank large amounts of water, she "diluted" the salt that was still in her blood and had a seizure. If your child plays an early morning sport, start the hydration process the night before so that they don't wake up already behind on fluids.

Avoid caffeine which is found in some sodas, iced tea and many energy drinks. Caffeine tends to dehydrate. Alcohol also dehydrates (think of the copious amount of fluid lost in urine after consumption of beer).

So, before your kid's next sports activity, remember the helmet, remember the shin guards, remember the padding and remember one of the most protective pieces of equipment of all – the water bottle.

Naline Lai, MD and Julie Kardos, MD
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