

What is dehydration?

Dehydration is a heat-related disease and risk for us all whenever we ride motorcycles in warm or cold weather. Persons over the age of 60 and people on certain medications are particularly susceptible to dehydration.

What causes dehydration?

Under normal conditions, we all lose body water daily through sweat, tears, urine, etc. Normally, this water is replaced by drinking fluids and eating foods that contain water. During extended periods of exercise such as dual-sport motorcycle rides, these fluids are not replaced quickly enough, and dehydration easily can occur.

What are the symptoms of dehydration?

The following are the most common symptoms of dehydration, although each individual may experience symptoms differently. Symptoms may include:

- thirst
- less-frequent urination
- dry skin
- fatigue
- light-headedness
- dizziness
- confusion
- dry mouth and mucous membranes
- increased heart rate and breathing

Treatment for mild dehydration:

If caught early, simple rehydration is recommended by drinking fluids. Many sports drinks on the market effectively restore body fluids, electrolytes, and salt balance.

How can dehydration be prevented?

- Drink plenty of fluids while on extended motorcycle rides
- Make sure you are taking in more fluid than you are losing.
- Drink appropriate sports drinks to help maintain electrolyte balance.

Recognizing symptoms of heat injury

There are three stages to heat illness injury; heat cramps, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke -- listed in order of increasing severity. Often the border between them is blurred into a continuous spectrum.

1. Heat cramps are due to muscle spasms and often occur in the arms, legs, or abdomen. They are thought to be caused by dehydration and loss of salt and other electrolytes.
2. Heat exhaustion is due to more profound loss of water and electrolytes. It is characterized by generalized weakness, headache, dizziness, low blood pressure, elevated pulse, and temperature elevation as high as 104 degrees F (40 degrees C). Both can usually be treated by moving out of the sun, drinking fluids, and eating salty food.
3. Heat stroke is a life threatening condition and represents severe dehydration, high body temperature, and a shut-down of the cooling mechanisms!

What are the symptoms of heat stroke?

The following are the most common symptoms of heat stroke, although each individual may experience symptoms differently. Symptoms may include:

- headache
- dizziness
- disorientation, agitation or confusion
- sluggishness or fatigue
- seizure
- hot, dry skin that is flushed but not sweaty
- a high body temperature
- loss of consciousness
- rapid heartbeat
- hallucinations

How is heat stroke treated?

It is important for the person to be treated immediately as heat stroke can cause permanent damage or death. There are some immediate first aid measures you can take while waiting for help to arrive.

- Get the person indoors or find shade.
- Have the person lie down with their feet slightly elevated.
- Remove clothing and gently apply cool water to the skin followed by fanning to stimulate sweating.
- Apply ice packs to the groin and armpits if available.

Which Drink is Better?

What drink is best for getting and staying hydrated while riding motorcycles? Should you choose water? Are sports drinks best? What about juice or carbonated soft drinks? I personally prefer sport drinks as I like the taste which helps me to keep drinking fluids, which is critical. Here is what I found out though.

Water

The natural choice for hydration is water. It hydrates better than any other liquid, both before and during exercise. Water tends to be less expensive and more available than any other drink. You need to drink 4-6 ounces of water for every 15-20 minutes of exercise.

That means drinking 70-100 ounces of water every 4 hours!

While some people prefer the taste of water over other drinks, most people find it relatively bland and will stop drinking water before becoming fully hydrated. Water is the best, but it only helps you if you drink it.

Sports Drinks

Sports drinks don't hydrate better than water, but you are more likely to drink larger volumes, which leads to better hydration. The typical sweet-tart taste combination doesn't quench thirst, so you will keep drinking a sports drink long after water has lost its appeal. An attractive array of colors and flavors are available. You can get a carbohydrate boost from sports drinks, in addition to electrolytes which may be lost from perspiration, and these drinks tend to offer lower calories than juice or soft drinks.

Energy Drinks

Energy drinks like Red Bull have caffeine in them which will not help hydrate you. In moderate quantities, they can help raise your energy levels and help with fatigue.

CARRY WATER AT ALL TIMES. Even if it is warm, it will hydrate you. You never know when you or someone may need water. If you break down alongside a road or stop and rest, make sure you are able to hydrate.

Ben Wynkoop
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