

How are your choppers?

By Julie Meek, Sports Dietitian (August 2017)



Preventing dehydration is key to enhance the performance and safety of junior athletes. The type and amount of fluid consumed is a major factor, with water being the most economical, accessible and readily available sports drink.

However, sometimes drinking water alone is not suitable when training sessions are long or the weather is excessively hot and humid. For training sessions lasting significantly longer than 1 hour, other fluids may be required. For junior athletes, using an electrolyte replacement such as Hydralyte is the best option during hot days and longer sessions. These tablets are simply placed and dissolved into a 750ml water bottle and contain electrolytes, including sodium (salt), potassium without added sugars or carbohydrates.

In some instances, sports drinks such as Powerade and Gatorade are ideal for intense sessions lasting longer than one hour because they provide carbohydrate and sodium (which is lost in sweat), as well as water.

There has been some concern within the dental profession that sports drinks may increase the risk of dental decay. The question is, are athletes at greater risk than the general population for dental caries and erosion?

The more often we consume food and drinks containing carbohydrate the greater the risk of dental decay. Many athletes will admit to eating more than their friends, family put together and will more than likely be eating often throughout the day.

Any foods or drinks (e.g. soft drinks, sports drinks and fruit juice) with fermentable carbohydrates (sugars and cooked starches) can be used by plaque bacteria to produce acid, which can dissolve (demineralisation) tooth enamel. The more frequently you eat or drink the greater the opportunity for demineralisation to occur.

Saliva is a good buffer against the plaque acids and contains high amounts of calcium and phosphate, which can remineralise enamel.

This process requires at least 2 hours between meals. Now there is a challenge, who can survive for two hours without food?

It is a good idea to avoid food intake directly before bedtime, as salivary flow decreases at night.

How can you help your child's teeth?

- Encourage them to try and minimise beverage contact with teeth by using a squeeze bottle and ingesting the fluid rapidly. If you drink from an open bottle or glass the whole mouth is being rinsed which increases the production of acid.
- Brush and floss teeth regularly. Mouthwashes may also be useful.
- Use sports drinks only when you need them and not as a thirst quencher. Water is the best fluid to drink routinely during the day.
- Try and leave 2 hours between consuming food and beverages containing carbohydrate.
- Try chewing gum without sugar as it increases the production of saliva. Of course, this will depend on the age of your gymnast.
- Avoid sugary drinks such as fruit juice and soft drinks as these contain large amounts of sugar and are not suitable for sport.