



Understanding Sports Drinks and Their Alternatives

Sports drink companies advertise that their products can help everyday people hydrate and perform like professional athletes. Their drinks may help you recover from long or intense exercise, such as a marathon. However, they are not needed for everyday use since they often contain large amounts of sugar, sodium, and potassium. Here are some facts.

Common Ingredients in Sports Drinks

- **Water:** The primary ingredient for hydration.
- **Electrolytes:** Sodium, potassium, magnesium, and calcium replenish minerals lost through sweat.
- **Carbohydrates:** Sugars like glucose, high-fructose corn syrup, and sucrose provide quick energy.
- **Vitamins:** Often include B vitamins for energy and antioxidants like vitamins A, C, and E, which protect cells from damage and reduce inflammation.

Why Sports Drinks Might Not Be the Best Choice for You

- **High Sugar Content:** Large amounts of sugar can contribute to Type 2 diabetes, dental problems, and a preference for sweeter foods. If you have not done high-intensity exercise for over an hour, then the extra sugars are often unnecessary and can lead to health issues.
- **High Sodium Levels:** High amounts of sodium can lead to increased blood pressure and other issues that affect your heart and blood vessels. The amount of sodium in sports drinks is not necessary unless you engage in high-intensity activities over a long time.

- **High Potassium Levels:** High amounts of potassium can cause stomach pain, diarrhea (loose stools), nausea, vomiting, irregular heartbeats, and damage to your heart. If you have not done long or intense exercise, you will get too much extra potassium from sports drinks.
- **Artificial Ingredients:** Some sports drinks contain artificial colors, flavors, and sweeteners that may have negative health effects.

Alternatives to Commercial Sports Drinks

The following are some of the best alternatives to commercial sports drinks. They may help you stay hydrated and replenish electrolytes naturally. These alternatives do not have the high amounts of sugar and electrolytes that are in some commercial sports drinks.

Coconut Water

- **Benefits:** Naturally rich in electrolytes like sodium, potassium, and magnesium. Low in calories and free from added sugars.
- **Directions:** Drink it as is or mix it with a splash of fruit juice for added flavor.

Herbal Teas

- **Benefits:** Can be customized with natural ingredients like ginger, lemon, and honey for added electrolytes and antioxidants.
- **Directions:** Brew a tea, let it cool, and customize it with a pinch of sea salt or other natural ingredients, if desired.





Fruit-Infused Water

- **Benefits:** Adds flavor and some vitamins to water and is free of added sugars.
- **Directions:** Add slices of your favorite fruits (like oranges, lemons, and berries) and a pinch of sea salt to your water.

Switchel

- **Benefits:** An old-fashioned drink made with water, apple cider vinegar, ginger, and a natural sweetener. It provides electrolytes and has anti-inflammatory properties.
- **Directions:** Mix water with 1 tablespoon of apple cider vinegar, 1 teaspoon of grated ginger, and 1 tablespoon of honey.

Watermelon Juice

- **Benefits:** High in water content and contains potassium and magnesium.
- **Directions:** Blend watermelon chunks and strain the juice. Add a pinch of sea salt if desired.



Fruit-Infused Water

Homemade Electrolyte Drinks

- **Benefits:** You control the ingredients and can leave out sugar and artificial additives.
- **Example Recipes:**

Lemon-Lime Electrolyte Drink

- **Ingredients:**
 - 1/4 cup fresh lemon juice
 - 1/4 cup fresh lime juice
 - 1 1/2 to 2 cups water
 - 1/8 teaspoon sea salt
 - 2 tablespoons honey or maple syrup
- **Directions:** Mix all ingredients in a bottle and shake well. Chill before drinking.

Coconut Water Electrolyte Drink

- **Ingredients:**
 - 2 cups coconut water
 - 1/2 cup orange juice
 - 1/4 cup lemon juice
 - 1/8 teaspoon sea salt
- **Directions:** Combine all ingredients in a bottle and shake well. Serve chilled.

Berry Electrolyte Drink

- **Ingredients:**
 - 1 cup water
 - 1 cup coconut water
 - 1/2 cup mixed berries (fresh or frozen)
 - 1 tablespoon honey
 - 1/8 teaspoon sea salt
- **Directions:** Blend all ingredients until smooth. Strain if desired. Serve chilled.

Note: The homemade electrolyte drink recipes are adapted from Triathlon Magazine. For the original recipes and more information, visit <https://triathlonmagazine.ca/nutrition/3-diy-electrolyte-drinks-to-make-this-summer>

