

# How To Hydrate For Better Performance

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If it's the summer cycling season, it's probably hot where you live. Cyclists and other outdoor athletes are the first to notice rising temperatures. And the hotter it is, the faster you lose fluids when you ride.

Fluids are crucial to your performance and sense of well-being. We're really just big bags of fluid—our blood contains about 50 percent water. Because water helps keep us cool, a loss of only one percent of our bodyweight as sweat means a significant loss of speed and endurance.

I know you've heard it before—drink, drink, drink! But it's amazing how few cyclists heed this advice. They forget to drink because of the excitement of the ride, then they wilt before the end.

But proper hydration is easy. Here's how:

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Ride Early or Late. You'll need to replace fewer fluids if you ride when it's cooler. One approach: commute by bike so you ride early in the morning and again in the evening when temperatures have moderated. Ralph Phillips, owner of Fairwheel Bikes in Tucson, beats summer temperatures above 100 degrees with dawn rides.

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Practice Drinking On the Bike. If you aren't comfortable taking one hand off the bar to pull the bottle from the cage, practice while riding in an empty parking lot or lightly traveled road with a wide shoulder. Hold the bar with your other hand near the stem to limit swerving as you reach down.

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Pre-hydrate. Make sure you're well hydrated before the ride. Most people are chronically dehydrated because they simply don't drink enough water. Keep a bottle on your desk and sip frequently all day. For an energy as well as fluid bonus, down 16 ounces of a sports drink about an hour before the ride.

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Drink During the Ride. Because your body's sensation of thirst lags behind its need for liquid, always sip from your bottle before you get thirsty. When you feel thirsty, it's already too late. Make it a habit to reach for your bottle every 15 minutes and slug down a couple of big swallows.

Most riders need one big bottle (about 28 ounces) per hour but it's highly variable depending on temperature, intensity of the ride, and other factors such as body size. Experience will help you judge your fluid needs.

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Hydrate After the Ride. No matter how much fluid you drink while riding, in hot weather you'll finish the ride depleted. Your stomach doesn't empty fast enough to keep up with the demand.

Weigh yourself before and after the ride. Compare the figures. If you've lost weight, drink 20 ounces of fluid for each pound of bodyweight you're down. Keep drinking until your weight has returned to normal and your urine is pale and plentiful.

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Restore Sodium Levels. Those white stains on your clothing and helmet straps after a hot ride come from the salt that you sweat out. It needs to be replaced. Low sodium levels are associated

with increased incidence of cramps. Heavy sodium losses lead to hyponatremia, a potentially life-threatening condition.

Your sports drink should contain at least 100 mg of sodium per 8 ounces (check the label). It may also help to salt your food when you're riding frequently in hot weather.