Tips for hydration during summer heat

By Meredith Cohn
The Baltimore Sun

With the extreme heat, and even in less extreme temperatures, those who spend any time outside must stay properly hydrated. Some drinks are better than others, and some people need more fluids than others, says Dr. Marc I. Leavey, an internist at Mercy Medical Center in Baltimore and Lutherville (Md.) Personal Physicians.

Q: Should people drink mineral/vitamin waters or Gatorade? And what about energy drinks (i.e., Red Bull, Rockstar): Are they dangerous? What about alcoholic drinks?

A: For dehydration from exercise and heat, cool water is still the best. In the case of dehydration from body fluid loss, vomiting and diarrhea, an electrolyte solution, or drinks such as Gatorade or Pedialyte, can be helpful when used according to package guidelines.

Nonetheless, adults can usually do well with water alone.

Taking salt tablets can lead to hypernatremia — too much salt in the body.

Energy drinks are a real problem. The caffeine in them stimulates the kidney to produce more urine when exercising, which will further dehydrate you. It may even have a bit of a laxative effect, with further undesirable effects. With heat and exercise, the pulse rate often rises, and the caffeine in these drinks can push it further, sometimes to dangerous levels.

Anyone who has ever had more than a few alcoholic drinks knows that alcohol promotes more urine production. In the face of heat and dehydration, this can only make a bad situation worse.

Q: What about "water intoxication"? Can you drink too much water?

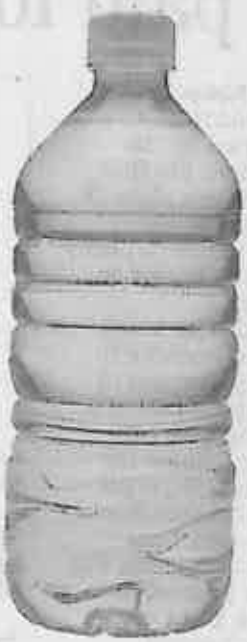
A: You certainly can drink too much water, although it is not common in healthy adults.

Young children do not have the capacity to absorb water as adults do, with excessive water being given to an infant easily able to overwhelm their system.

During hot weather, particularly with those who are working outside or participating in strenuous sports, one can lose enough electrolytes in perspiration and urine that replacement with only water can lead to hyponatremia — too little salt in the body — which is a potentially life-threatening condition. This is one situation where ... electrolyte drinks can be a useful tool.

Q: What about people with pre-existing conditions?

A: Any medical condition that affects fluid and electrolyte balance makes one more at risk for developing complications from the heat, from dehydration and from the effects of fluid loss and replacement.



Whether you rely on gallon jugs, water bottles, a hydration backpack or a nearby water fountain, you need to replace the water your body loses in hot weather. GETTY IMAGES