

The Parent & Athlete Hydration Guide

A free resource from NobleMed IV · Reviewed by an Emergency Medicine Physician

Know the signs. Know when to hydrate. Know when to get help.

WHY THIS GUIDE EXISTS

Florida heat is relentless, and young athletes are among the most vulnerable to dehydration and heat illness — especially in the first weeks of a new season, before their bodies adapt. Most heat emergencies are preventable. This guide gives you the same practical framework an ER physician would: what to do **before**, **during**, and **after** activity, which warning signs to watch for, and exactly when to get help.

1

Before Activity

Hydrate all day — not at the last minute

The body can only absorb fluids so fast. An athlete who arrives at practice already behind on fluids cannot “catch up” mid-practice.

- Encourage water with every meal and between classes.
- Simple pre-practice check: urine should be **pale yellow**. Dark yellow means start drinking now.
- **Skip energy drinks**. High caffeine + heat + exertion is a bad combination, especially for kids and teens.
- Eat normally — food provides much of the sodium and fluid the body uses during exercise.

THE 2-WEEK DANGER WINDOW

The first 1–2 weeks of preseason are the highest-risk period of the year. Bodies need 10–14 days of gradually increasing activity to adapt to exertion in heat. If your athlete has been mostly indoors all summer, tell the coach — easing in is a **safety** issue, not a toughness issue.

Also check the **heat index** (temperature + humidity), not just the temperature. High humidity keeps sweat from evaporating — and evaporation is how the body cools itself.

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During Activity

Drink on a schedule, not on thirst

- **Thirst lags behind need**. In Florida heat, a water break every 15–20 minutes is a good rhythm for youth sports.
- **Water vs. electrolytes**: under ~1 hour of activity, water is usually enough. Longer, very intense, or heavy-sweat sessions call for an electrolyte drink to replace sodium lost in sweat.
- Shade and rest breaks are hydration strategy — cooling down lowers fluid loss.
- **Buddy awareness**: teach athletes to watch teammates. A person sliding into heat illness often can't recognize it in themselves — confusion is part of the danger.

3

Warning Signs Parents & Coaches Miss

EARLY SIGNS — act now: rest, shade, fluids, cooling

- Unusual fatigue or “loafing” — a hustling kid who suddenly slows down
- Headache · muscle cramps · dizziness when standing
- Irritability or crankiness (very common in kids — easily misread as attitude)
- Flushed face, dry mouth
- Dark urine, or long stretches without urinating

IN BABIES & YOUNG CHILDREN

- No wet diaper for 3+ hours
- Crying without tears
- Sunken eyes; in infants, a sunken soft spot
- Unusual sleepiness or floppiness

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Heat Exhaustion vs. Heat Stroke

Knowing the difference can save a life

HEAT EXHAUSTION — serious. Act immediately.

Signs: heavy sweating · cool, pale, clammy skin · weakness · nausea · headache · dizziness · fast but weak pulse. *Feels awful but thinks clearly.*

Do this: Stop activity. Move somewhere cool. Loosen clothing. Sip water or an electrolyte drink. Cool with wet cloths or a cool shower.

Get medical help if: vomiting, worsening symptoms, or symptoms lasting more than 1 hour.

HEAT STROKE — CALL 911. Every minute matters.

Signs: body temperature 103°F+ · hot, red skin (dry or damp) · **confusion, slurred speech, strange behavior** · strong rapid pulse · collapse or seizure.

Do this: Call 911. Move to shade or A/C. Cool aggressively — cool water, wet cloths, ice packs to the neck, armpits, and groin — while waiting for EMS.

Never give fluids to anyone confused or unconscious — they can choke.

THE RULE OF THUMB: Feels terrible but thinks clearly → heat exhaustion. The mind changes → heat stroke → 911.

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When to Get Medical Help

GO TO THE ER OR CALL 911 IF THERE IS:

- Confusion, disorientation, or unusual behavior
- Fainting, unresponsiveness, or seizure
- Temperature of 103°F or higher
- Persistent vomiting — can't keep fluids down
- No urination for many hours despite fluids
- Chest pain or trouble breathing
- Severe symptoms in an infant, an older adult, or someone with heart disease, kidney disease, or diabetes

Home fluids, rest, and cooling are for **mild** symptoms only. When symptoms cross these lines, they need a hospital — not home care and not a wellness service. **When in doubt, choose the ER.**

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After Activity

Recovery hydration takes hours

- Keep drinking through the evening — rehydration is not instant.
- Pale yellow urine = caught up.
- Water plus a normal meal restores electrolytes naturally.
- Watch for delayed symptoms: headache, nausea, or unusual fatigue hours after practice can mean the athlete is still behind on fluids.

Print this and keep it in your bag

QUICK REFERENCE CARD

HYDRATE	All day before · every 15–20 min during · through the evening after
WATER vs. ELECTROLYTES	Water under an hour · electrolytes for long, intense, or heavy-sweat activity
EARLY SIGNS	Fatigue · headache · cramps · irritability · dizziness · dark urine
HEAT EXHAUSTION	Heavy sweat, pale clammy skin, nausea → cool down, sip fluids · get help if not better in 1 hour
HEAT STROKE	Hot red skin · 103°F+ · CONFUSION → CALL 911. Cool aggressively. No fluids by mouth if confused.

Sources & review. Hydration Safe Tampa materials draw on publicly available guidance from the CDC (heat & health), CDC/NIOSH heat-stress resources, the National Weather Service, and youth-sports heat-acclimatization policies, and are reviewed by Jones M. King, MD, Emergency Medicine.

Disclaimer. This guide is general education only and is not medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment, and is not a substitute for individualized care from a qualified healthcare provider. If you believe someone is experiencing a medical emergency — including possible heat stroke — call 911 immediately.

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