

10 Post-Run Drinks to Fuel Fast Recovery

By Matthew G. Kadey, M.Sc., R.D.
Runner's World

You just finished a run on a warm day and you're hot, tired, and thirsty. Of course you could reach for your favorite neon-hued sports drink, and there's nothing wrong with that. But runners often forget all the other options out there. In fact, research has shown that plenty of other types of beverages (some of which may already be in your refrigerator) have their own healthful qualities and can help you stay hydrated before, during, or after your run.

"Mother Nature has given us a huge range of healthy drinks," says Molly Kimball, R.D., a sports dietitian at Ochsner Elmwood Fitness Center in New Orleans. "They're refreshing and can recharge muscles and benefit performance." And (most important) they taste good, too.

Iced Green Tea

When: Pre- or postrun and on easy runs less than an hour

Why: Green tea is a stellar source of catechins, antioxidants that fight heart disease and cancer. According to research, catechins can reduce muscle damage caused by exercise, and also speed recovery. A recent study found that people who had the equivalent of five cups of green tea daily for three months and exercised lost more belly fat than those who only exercised. Iced green tea is a tasty alternative to water on easy, short runs, says Leslie Bonci, R.D., director of sports nutrition at the Pittsburgh Medical Center. Plus, tea contains caffeine, which boosts speed and endurance. If you drink iced green tea often, go with unsweetened, says Kimball, to avoid taking in excess calories.

Sipping Points: Steep tea bags for at least three minutes to release more catechins. If you buy bottled, choose brands with fewer than 15 grams of sugar per eight ounces.

Coconut Water

When: Pre- or postrun or on runs of about 60 minutes

Why: Coconut water, the clear liquid found inside the fruit, contains none of the fat found in coconut milk and has a tangy, light almond flavor. Eleven ounces contain 14 grams of sugar and 670 milligrams of potassium—way more than sports drinks. "Potassium works closely with sodium to maintain water balance and helps trigger muscles to contract and relax optimally," says Suzanne Girard Eberle, R.D., author of *Endurance Sports Nutrition*. Coconut water has enough carbohydrates for an hour-long run but not enough sodium for longer efforts. Sipping Points: Coconut water, which is fat-free, comes plain or flavored with mango, orange peel, or passion fruit.

Chocolate Milk

When: Postrun

Why: The drink you loved as a kid has the ideal amount of carbohydrates and protein that tired muscles need for recovery, says Joel Stager, Ph.D., director of the department of kinesiology at Indiana University. According to a study Stager led, drinking chocolate milk postexercise speeds up recovery and increases the time it takes to reach exhaustion during a subsequent exercise session better than sports drinks. And a 2007 British study found that regular milk is better than water or a sports drink at restoring fluid levels following a bout of exercise in the heat. Plus, milk contains bone-strengthening vitamin D and calcium. Sipping Points: Single-serving containers are handy for tossing into a cooler for a postrun treat and for portion control.

Cherry Juice

When: After a hard run

Why: If George Washington was more of an athlete, he never would have felled his dad's cherry tree. A study done in 2008 by British researchers found that runners who drank 16 ounces of tart cherry juice in the days before, the day of, and two days after a marathon decreased inflammation, oxidative stress, and muscle damage. "Cherry juice is very useful for postexercise recovery," says Declan Connolly, Ph.D., professor of physical education and exercise science at

the University of Vermont. Cherries are higher in antioxidant and anti-inflammatory properties than many other types of fruit. Try drinking a cup of tart cherry juice after exercise—particularly during heavy training. But don't guzzle it like it's tap water: One cup has about 30 grams of natural sugar and 130 calories. Sipping Points: If cherry juice is too tart for you, try a sweeter blend with cherries and other 100 percent fruit juices.

Vegetable Juice

When: Postrun

Why: Chock-full of a variety of nutrients in a concentrated package, 100 percent vegetable juice is a tasty way to get a serving or two of veggies. Those made mostly with tomatoes have lots of lycopene, an antioxidant that a British Journal of Nutrition study found protects muscles from oxidative stress caused by exercise. Many brands have three to five times the amount of sodium and 13 to 17 times the amount of potassium in sports drinks, "which makes vegetable juice an ideal part of a postrun snack or meal that includes carbs and protein," says Kimball. Sipping Points: Sodium levels can range from 140 to 620 milligrams in regular (non-low sodium) brands. Choose higher levels if you crave salt postrun.

Coconut Shake

Protein, carbs, and electrolytes make this an ideal drink to add to your postrun nutrition routine

1 11-ounce container coconut water
1 cup cherry juice
1 scoop unflavored or vanilla protein powder
½ cup strawberries, frozen
1 banana

Add all the ingredients to a blender and whirl until smooth. Serves one.

Calories: 440
Carbs: 70 g
Protein: 27 g
Fat: 2 g

Road Tested

Runners try the newest sports drinks.

Powerade Ion4

What's New: The reformulated drink has a bit of calcium and magnesium, two electrolytes lost in sweat, and sodium and potassium.

Testers' Take: "It's sweet, but not too sweet." "I thought the extra electrolytes gave me a boost during a warm run." powerade.com

Clif Quench

What's New: This drink contains a tad less carbohydrate and more sodium than many sports drinks. It has no added coloring, so it's clear.

Testers' Take: "The lime-aid flavor reminds me of a margarita." "It definitely has a light, clean, refreshing taste." "I love that it doesn't contain crazy colors." clifbar.com

Gatorade Powder Pack

What's New: The old standby Thirst Quencher now comes in handy single-serving packs of powder. Add one to a 16.9-ounce bottle of water, shake, drink.

Testers' Take: "They're really convenient. I kept some stashed in my car, gym bag, and desk."
"The powder mixed up easily." gatorade.com

Accelerade Hydro

What's New: This low-calorie drink has 30 percent fewer calories than most sports drinks, plus protein, which may help recovery.

Testers' Take: "It's less sweet than most sports drinks. I thought it was refreshing." "Many protein drinks have a heavy, chalky taste-this was mild." accelsport.com