



equilibrium lifestyle management

## PERFECTLY NATURAL FUEL

By Hana A. Feeney, MS, RD, CSSD

Red 40, modified food starch, high-fructose corn syrup, glycerol ester, aspartame...fuel for optimal performance? Think again! You are an athlete! You understand that what you put into your body makes a difference. So when choosing sports products, make sure to read the ingredient list.

The ingredient list is the key to identifying high-quality sports products to optimally fuel your workouts. Natural products will give you an edge during exercise, support improved recovery, and keep you fit. You exercise to stay healthy--there's no reason to be filling your tank with unhealthy and unnatural ingredients.

### Fueling Fundamentals

When using a sports drink, gel or chew, keep a few basics in mind. You will need to replenish fluid, carbohydrate and sodium during any activity lasting longer than 60-90 minutes. Fluid comes from either sport drinks or water. Carbohydrate and sodium come from sport drinks, gels and chews. It's up to you to find the right combination of these products. The biggest factor in choosing a natural product is to understand the type of carbohydrate being used. Then assess the additives: some for performance such as ginseng or green tea extract and others which are potentially harmful such as synthetic food dye and artificial sweeteners.

### Type of Carbohydrate

There are various options for naturally derived carbohydrates in sports products. The most refined carbohydrate source is high-fructose corn syrup--avoid this. Look for evaporated cane juice, brown rice syrup, or fruit concentrates to sweeten your fuel. Dextrose and fructose are other added sugars that you might see in natural products. Maltodextrin is a carbohydrate used in many drinks and gels—it has no flavor and is preferred for those who don't like super-sweet products.

Choose a product that has multiple naturally derived carbohydrate sources for better absorption and reduced stomach issues during exercise. For example, a product that only uses maltodextrin will have a light flavor but absorption of carbohydrate can't be maximized. This will impair performance when exercising for longer than three hours but is fine for a shorter workout. Products that have a blend of carbohydrates, such as maltodextrin, fructose, dextrose and fruit concentrate provide four different sources of carbohydrate. Multiple types of



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carbohydrate are preferred for ultra-endurance exercise or if you have a sensitive stomach.

### **Unnecessary Additives**

Scan the ingredient list for unnecessary additives. Xylitol is a sugar alcohol that provides sweetness without adding sugar. Sounds good? Your stomach may not agree--watch out for gas and bloating with xylitol. Artificial sweeteners such as sucralose, aspartame and acesulfame potassium are added to sports products for sweetness with zero calories. This makes the product super-sweet, which is a major complaint of many exercisers and the reason why so many people avoid sports drinks. There is no place for artificial sweeteners or synthetic food dyes in a sport product. Avoid Red 40--an example of a synthetic food dye. Look for beet juice instead--an example of a natural red dye.

### **Better Brands**

There are a few brands that include natural ingredients in their sports products and do not use high-fructose corn syrup, food dyes or artificial sweeteners. Look for these sport product lines:

- Carb Boom!
- Clif
- Gu

### **Make Your Own!**

Get in the kitchen and be creative! You can make your own sport drink with the best quality juices, water and sea salt. Completely natural, tasty and you'll save a buck! Test it out to make sure it is palatable at various temperatures and doesn't cause any stomach upset. Here are couple recipes to start with:

#### **Tart Cherry Sport Drink**

Tart cherries help to reduce inflammation associated with exercise.

- 32 ounces water
- 1 teaspoon sea salt
- 24 ounces Knudsen Tart Cherry Juice (if this is too tart for you use regular cherry juice instead)
- ¼ cup lemon juice

*Makes seven 8-ounce servings*

*60 calories, 177 mg sodium, 186 mg potassium, 15 grams carbohydrate*



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### **Pina Colada Sport Drink**

The coconut water gives a light flavor, a few carbohydrates and tons of potassium.

- 12 ounces water
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- 32 ounces O.N.E. Coconut water
- 12 ounces 100% pineapple juice
- ¼ cup lemon juice

*Makes seven 8-ounce servings*

*60 calories, 194 mg sodium, 352 mg potassium, 15 grams carbohydrate*

#### **Directions for making your own sport drink:**

Bring the tap or bottled water to a boil. Dissolve the salt in the water. Mix in juice and coconut water (if using). Chill and consume.

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