



Do you have a health-related question to ask the USA Gymnastics Health Care Referral Network? If so, send it to USA Gymnastics magazine, Pan American Plaza, 201 S. Capitol Ave., Suite 300, Indianapolis, IN 46225.

Q. I'm a Level 8 gymnast from California. Some of my teammates carry a water bottle with them during practice. Some of us don't. I feel bloated when I drink water during practice. Should gymnasts drink water during practice?

A. Water is extremely important to your body throughout the day, especially during a three hour work out!

Water is the most important of all nutrients, especially to athletes. All of the body's chemical reactions take place in water, including making energy that enables you to do gymnastics. Water also helps keep your body temperature normal. When you exercise you can feel your body getting warmer as your temperature naturally rises. Most athletes will sweat as a natural mechanism to cool themselves. If you do not drink water to replace the water lost, then your body will not perform at its best. You may feel dizzy, weak, have difficulty concentrating, or have blurred vision if you don't drink enough water while at practice. These problems could even lead to injury.

For your next practice try following these guidelines to make sure you're getting enough water and are hydrated properly.

1 cup of water before practice

2 to 3 ounces every 15-20 minutes during practice

1 cup of water after practice

If you wait until you're thirsty to drink, your body already has too little water. The safest way to make sure you're getting enough is to drink on schedule. Drinking water at the start of each rotation is an easy way to remind yourself to drink more water. Carrying your own water bottle also helps. You can also get water from the foods you eat before and after practice, like melon, oranges, apples, soup or milk.

Thanks to Kim LaPiana, MS., RD. for responding to the question. Kim works at Elite Performance Physical Therapy in Newport Beach, Calif., and can be reached at 714-851-1610.

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