

Water: The Body's Most Essential Component by Cheryl Wheeler, C.N.

Water is the most abundant, and most important, nutrient in the body. It has also been an oft-neglected nutrient by athletes, due to foolish beliefs by some that water consumption adds weight, inhibits performance and causes cramps during workouts. Quite the opposite, however, is true.

If martial artists did nothing else but drink more water, including substituting water for sugary sodas, they would feel a tremendous impact on their overall health. I've attended numerous martial arts tournaments where competitors are sitting around waiting for their divisions, drinking sodas that actually dehydrate them due to the excessive amounts of salt and sugar such soft drinks contain.

Two-thirds of the human body is water. It's contained in blood, bones, skin and internal organs. Even dense muscle is half water, surprising as it may seem. Water is involved in nearly every bodily process, including digestion, absorption, circulation and excretion. Water is responsible for transporting nutrients throughout the body, building new tissues, and carrying off waste products. It is vital to optimum athletic performance and, obviously, to life itself.

All foods contain water, which is absorbed by the body during digestion. Fruits and vegetables contain the highest amount of chemically pure water. Tap water, ground water and even well water usually are contaminated with environmental toxins, pesticides, industrial wastes, metals and nitrates. To obtain the purest source of drinking water, install a home water purification unit or purchase purified, bottled water.

air temperature and relative humidity.

The average 150-pound martial artist contains about 45 quarts of water. Fluid losses from sweating during exercise make water intake a critical concern. A sedentary, 150-pound adult in a temperate climate loses about three quarts of water a day through perspiration and excretion, but this same individual can lose more than 10 quarts of water a day in the desert. A 150-pound marathon runner can lose even more than 10 quarts—up to eight or nine percent of his body weight—during one of his 26-mile runs. Obviously, proper hydration is extremely important to any athlete.

You are likely familiar with that feeling of soreness and sluggishness after a particularly hard training session. But did you know that drinking plenty of water after an intense workout can significantly reduce muscle soreness and lactic acid build-up in the muscles by flushing out toxic by-products of exercise? The body cannot effectively wash and remove toxins from its cells without adequate amounts of water.

Do yourself a big favor and make sure you are getting enough water each day. Most nutritionists recommend drinking eight-to-10 glasses of purified water a day. This doesn't include sodas, coffee, alcohol, etc.—just plain, pure, unadulterated water. Just this small change in diet can dramatically improve the way a martial artist feels and performs.

About the columnist: Cheryl Wheeler is a certified nutritionist and former world kickboxing champion who is also one of the top motion picture stuntwomen.

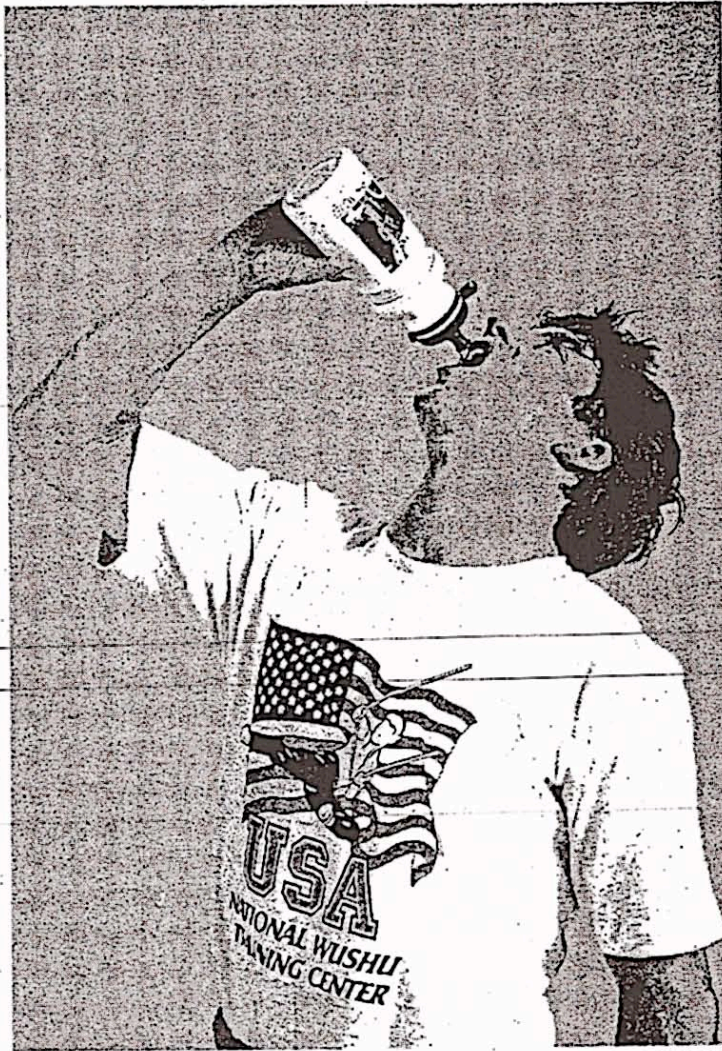


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During strenuous exercise, the body regulates its temperature with perspiration—its natural air-conditioning system. Sweating helps keep the body cool only if the perspiration stays on the skin. If it immediately evaporates, as occurs in the extreme dry air of desert and mountain areas, the body's cooling system fails to protect an athlete. In a dry environment, the body's demand for fluid intake is increased. The rate and amount of fluid loss during exercise depends on the intensity and duration of the activity, and environmental conditions such as