

**TOO MUCH OF A GOOD THING**  
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Recently water intoxication, or hyponatremia, has made its way into the news. Hyponatremia does not occur from drinking the recommended 8 glasses of water per day. I fear people will start to unnecessarily limit their intake of water due to misconceptions they have about hyponatremia. I have yet to hear the news story that goes on to explain that water is important to our overall health and that water intoxication is not an everyday occurrence, but more likely to occur with intense workout sessions.

**What is Water Intoxication?**

It is actually hyponatremia which occurs when little or no sodium is in the bloodstream. Think of a glass full of salt-water. If you dump out half of the salt-water in the glass, as your body does when you are sweating and replace this glass with only water, the sodium concentration in the glass is far less than it previously was.

**Who Normally Gets Hyponatremia?**

This often occurs in the bloodstream of an athlete who only drinks water during excessive sweating. If you add on extra endurance practices that take place in hot, humid conditions you have the ideal conditions for hyponatremia to develop, for example the marathon runner or football player who are in intense heat practicing or participating in their sport.

Hyponatremia has also occurred as a result of hazing, in which pledges are forced to drink pitchers of water through a funnel in an initiation process know as water torture.

**What Are The Signs and Symptoms of Hyponatremia?**

Muscle cramps, confusion, nausea, slurred speech and confusion. These symptoms may cause the athlete to believe they are dehydrated and cause them to drink more water, which increases the problem. Severe hyponatremia may cause seizures, coma and even death.

**What Can Be Done to Prevent Hyponatremia?**

1. Drink sodium containing sports drinks during high intensity exercise.
2. Eat foods containing 1 gram of sodium per hour before and during high intensity exercise, such as chicken noodle soup, dill pickles, cheese, pretzels and tomato juice.
3. Weigh yourself before and after high intensity exercise and drink enough sodium based sports drink to offset any fluid lost during exercise.
4. Increase salt intake by 10-25 grams per day several days prior to competition.
5. Educate your children on the symptoms of hyponatremia, so they can report it to their coaches if they are experiencing any of them.
6. If you experience symptoms of dehydration after or during an intense workout it may be water intoxication. You should immediately drink a sports drink, such as Gatorade, which contains sodium. If symptoms are severe, you should seek medical assistance.

Information for this article was obtained from MASH, Incorporated at [222.mashinc.org](http://222.mashinc.org).