

Rider Dehydration

(Contributed by Karla Watson for the Pacific Northwest Endurance Rides, Inc. Family News newsletter in July 2005)

You are riding along feeling fine. The weather is warm and your horse has eaten and even drank! You are thrilled. You come into the vet check and when you dismount you feel quite dizzy & lightheaded. Why? You may be dehydrated.

As much as we worry about our horses' hydration, we often overlook our own.

Dehydration can occur during the first 30 minutes of exercise, particularly in hot weather. Dehydration is one of the risk factors for heat exhaustion and heat stroke, which causes over 400 deaths per year. The early stages of dehydration often do not show any symptoms.

As dehydration gets worse, you will start to feel thirsty. Your mouth may also feel dry. These warning signs should not be ignored. With further dehydration, you will develop a flushed face, extreme thirst, and you may stop sweating and develop dry skin. You may no longer urinate or have very small amounts of dark yellow urine. You may then feel weak, dizzy, develop muscle cramps, a headache, and/or develop a dry mouth and a dry tongue.

If your dehydration is not taken care of at this point, you may pass out or get very lightheaded. Hot, flushed, dry skin is common, as your body can no longer keep the temperature down. Severe muscle cramps and confusion at this stage may send you to the nearest emergency room.

Don't wait until you become thirsty to drink fluids during an endurance ride! By the time you become thirsty, you already would have lost more body fluids, which can decrease your riding ability.

If you notice you are feeling thirsty, have a dry mouth or notice that your urine has become dark yellow, drink a large amount of water—at least one liter. If you have symptoms of more severe dehydration, such as muscle cramps or weakness, take at least a fifteen-minute break in the shade while drinking as much fluid as you can handle.

How do you know if you are drinking enough? A good sign of hydration is the output of large volumes of clear, dilute urine. If it's dark in color, you are not drinking enough.

I talked to some endurance riders and got some advice about this problem. Here are some TIPS from others who have had hydration problems and how they have dealt with it:

- ❖ Try to drink a lot of water the day before!! At the vet checks, use a small cooler to keep extra water in to refill your water container. Try to use the around the waist Coolbak from Campmor because the hose is so easy to get to and you don't have to waste time unscrewing caps from water bottles. Drink Gatorade in your water container or put a tsp. of electrolytes in your water. It's the same stuff I give my horses and it's sweet. ---Deb
- ❖ I use something called e.gel it is from Crank Sports. It works awesome. I just drink water with it. It is made for runners and other high power sports. I do also sweat a lot! I only use the "Mountain Rush" flavor I like it the best. Once you get over the feeling on the gel in your mouth it is great. ---Diana Peterson
- ❖ My experience with camelbaks was the heat they keep in because of the large amount of surface area they covered was a huge problem. The heat it kept overrode the benefit they provided from supplying water. I threw my away and did much better. The biggest breakthrough came when an old buddy of mine visited. We used to play a lot of tennis and played many a tournament together. He reminded me of the rule we had in tennis -drink before you need to. Drink at every net change. In endurance that translates to drinking starting five miles in the ride—before you get 5% dehydrated and it is starting to become a problem. Drink early and drink often is the key. Camelbaks hold in a lot of heat and for my money are a bigger problem than solution. The important thing is to drink early and drink often. If you wait till thirsty you are already too far gone. ---Truman Prevatt
- ❖ The bottom line is drink water, and start the ride well hydrated. Just like how you want your horse, eh? --Jonni
- ❖ And you've got the answer here—FOOD!! An important part of hydration is EATING. ---Heidi Smith
- ❖ Camelbacks do make my back hot. However, I for some reason never seem to "remember" to get water bottles out to drink. I'll go an entire loop and not pull them out. My husband got me the camelbak after I had to pull from a 50 at 38 miles from heat/dehydration problems (had been puking off the side of my horse for the previous 5 miles or so). Another rider came upon me sitting motionless on my horse, blacking in and out, and got my horse to follow hers the remaining few miles to camp. I'll take a hot patch on my back to *that* experience any time. I'll drink every little while out of the Camelbak, no problem. --Dawn Carrie
- ❖ I always carry one straight water and one mixed half with Gatorade. I try to remember to drink every time my horse does or when we slow down for a breather or meet up with the pit crew. It is important to drink before you become THIRSTY. ---Maggie Mieske
- ❖ Start the morning out with a slimfast. It is full of stuff you need to keep you going. You can also have it along with oatmeal to start the day. At every vet check Have both a slimfast and v8 juice or plain tomato juice or low sodium tomato juice I prefer. Also at lunch break have some extra carbs, in form of bread. While you are riding drink lots of water. I don't recommend gatoraid type products. When I have used them in the past, after 50 miles I start puking. It is too much sodium for me. I do best on high potassium products---Lianne Cantrall

- ❖ I basically drink my breakfast too which means I pee at least once during the early part of the ride. I've also used SUCCEED the ultrasports drink. Not icky sweet. Also carry some e'lyte caps with me "in case." But once when I really needed e'lytes and didn't have any caps, I swallowed a tad of my horse's e'lytes. Whew, what we put in our horses' mouths! Did the trick almost instantaneously. ---Laney Humphrey
- ❖ I learned from my first ride how important water is — not just to carry, but to use! I carry a camelback bladder in my cantle saddle bag, not on my back. The sipping hose is clipped to anything on the side of the saddle...sometimes even myself! Easy to just snatch it on the go, drink, and let the alligator clip grab whatever it can grab to hold the tube — and do it all without looking. I also carry two small water bottles — one holds juice (for instant carbohydrates), the other holds Pedalyte (human electrolyte) mixed with water. To keep myself hydrated I make it a point to drink whenever my pony drinks. As he's sucking up water, I'm also chugging down. A friend of mine once said that a rider should never come back into camp with water in their bottles. Good advice that pays off. ---Flora Hillman
- ❖ I always feel though that if you aren't taking care of yourself, you can't take care of your horse!-
--Ranelle Rubin
- ❖ Teddy Lancaster from Running Bear said to put 1 tsp. of equine electrolytes into my Coolbak. That's about 1-1/2 bottles of water you get at the store. Don't know what that is but I don't think it really matters. You could put 1 tsp. into your water bottle. ---Deb
- ❖ On really hot rides I try to have the bottles frozen so that as they melt the water is cold. It also helps to hold the bottle against the back of my neck. ---Truman Prevatt
- ❖ Eat foods high in water content like cantaloupe, watermelon, strawberries, grapes. You get carbs with water and they help keep you hydrated. ---unknown rider
- ❖ There is no secret. When you get that dry taste in your mouth and you feel thirsty and everything gets dry, you waited too long and you've blown it. Hydrate well prior to any stress on your body and sip on an on going basis. Check out Gookinaid. Great stuff. Makes Gatorade look and act like cool aid. Most of the crap out there in the normal stores is about as good as cool aid. Too much Salt and not enough Potassium and too high in bad sugars. ---Gary Affleck
- ❖ Here's what I do. I wear a 100 oz. Camelbak. On hot rides I fill it with a mix of water and Hydralyte (used to be called Gookinaid), approximately 1/2 the recommended strength. On rides with more moderate temps, I just use water. Tried gatorade, but it didn't sit well with me, and the higher potassium/lower sodium of Hydralyte seems to do better for me. I *try* to drain it every loop, but often don't. I also make myself drink as much water as possible during holds. ---
Dawn Carrie

- ❖ What I realized I was NOT doing, was pre-load hydrating myself the days before a ride. We all worry so much about our horses doing so, yet I think many of us do not drink enough before the rides ourselves to go into it well hydrated. So, I start really making sure I am drinking lots of water the days before. --- Jonni Jewell
- ❖ I have learned from other runners that Succeed Electrolyte caps work well. I tried another electrolyte capsule before, but it didn't have enough sodium. These do, and they have some sort of buffering agent added. I take 1-2 per hour and drink plenty of water or gatorade. It's so easy to just take a pill (as long as you remember to do it!) Have them within easy reach. Dehydration is a subtle thing, and that probably applies to horses too. When it starts you can still keep going, but you don't feel so strong anymore. Then you start feeling queezy and tired. ---Linda Dewees
- ❖ Your judgment gets messed up when you are dehydrated. If you are lucky enough to have friends/crew, they should notice a change in you. Learn to take your own pulse. Normal is between 60 and 100. Anything over 120 should alert you that you are in the least starting to have a problem. ---Mary Ann Spencer
- ❖ If you like it, V8 Juice is just about perfect - not much sugar, so no insulin bounce, tons of electrolytes. I make sure and keep some on ice for vet checks. --- David LeBlanc