

ENCAMPMENT HYDRATION SAFETY TIPS

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During encampment season, it is imperative we ensure our Cadets and Senior members remember some hydration safety tips prior, during, and after encampment. Hydration isn't a one and done kind of safety topic. People in general neglect hydration as a safety topic. "I always have something to drink", "I eat the ice in my drink", or any number of other phrases are used to rationalize their lack of hydration maintenance. So how do we as leaders combat this dangerous thing? Here is a hopefully an effective message to get leaders to start thinking about hydration safety.

Water. There is no substitute. Water is what keeps us hydrated. Not Gatorade or other "electrolyte replacement" drinks, using Gatorade is not bad, but the emphasis needs to remain on water, not coffee, not energy drinks, and not the ice we put into our drinks. Leaders need to ensure they are monitoring both cadets and seniors for adequate water intake, especially in hot environments. At a recent encampment, a cadet arrived in the early afternoon and within minutes was suffering from the effects of dehydration. When the cadet was asked about the last time, they had anything to drink, their response was, "I had two Red Bulls with my breakfast." Not the answer we had hoped for. Luckily the staff was able to get this cadet hydrated and back into the encampment without incident.

Food. When we sweat, we lose valuable minerals. One of the best ways to replenish those minerals is by making sure we eat healthy, well-balanced meals. At encampments, planners need to ensure that cadets and seniors alike have and are eating healthy meals not only to have the energy to complete the tasks and events of the encampment, but also to replenish lost minerals and nutrients they lose during heightened levels of activity and from perspiration.

There is also a long-standing and strongly held belief that salt is lost during sweating. In the past, this led to coaches and others recommending salt tablets to "restore the lost salt". Sweat is "hyponatremic", salt content is less than the salt content of the fluids in the body. When sweating, we raise the internal salt level, not decrease it with sweating. The fallacy of all the electrolyte drinks is based on this misconception.

These few items, while simple, end up being some of the hardest things to do at large events. Here are some tips and tricks for leaders at all levels to help ensure members are doing the right thing and staying safe:

- Ensure EVERYONE has a portable water source. (Camelbak, Canteen, reusable water bottle, etc.)
- Make sure everyone fills their water sources prior to leaving the chow hall, barracks, etc. Leaders check their charges prior to moving out to the next location.
- Ensure members are eating their meals, drinking AT LEAST one full glass of water with every meal, and limit the sugary desserts during mealtime.
- Planners make sure that water is available at all locations in sufficient quantities for people to refill water sources as necessary.
- Make sure everyone is watching everyone else for signs of dehydration and heat related injuries.

This short article is encampment focused, and by no means all inclusive, these tips apply to all leaders at every level during any event where heat plays a factor. Stay hydrated and have fun!