

Alcohol Use and Athletic Performance

Alcohol can compromise the benefits of athletic training, reduce your performance and exacerbate injuries. In order to maximize your training and performance, the best decision you can make is avoid alcohol all together. If you do decide to consume alcohol in season, use the following recommendations:

Pre-event: Avoid alcohol for 48 hours prior to competition or hard training sessions. Alcohol is a diuretic and drastically increases your risk of dehydration. Dehydration reduces your ability to perform and makes you more susceptible to cramping. Alcohol also impairs the body's ability to regulate heat, impairing endurance. Alcohol use is especially detrimental to your health and performance during prolonged exercise or hot weather.

Post-event and post-workout: Avoid alcohol for 24 hours. Alcohol intake after exercise interferes with muscle recovery, glycogen replenishment and hydration. If you are going to drink after an event, be smart and eat and rehydrate first.

Impact of on alcohol performance

Acute alcohol consumption compromises psychomotor skills, oxygen consumption, exercise capacity, muscle strength, cardiovascular endurance and hydration status. Chronic or excessive alcohol use has considerable long-term consequences that are particularly problematic for athletes including atrophy of type II muscle fibers (those used in anaerobic exercise), reduced muscle mass, reduced strength and nutrient deficiencies. Alcohol use can also compromise your immune response, making you more susceptible to colds and flu.

For injured athletes

Avoid any alcohol 24 hours post-exercise if you have any soft tissue injuries or bruises. Alcohol and injuries are a bad combination. Alcohol may actually increase swelling, bleeding and delay recovery. Research has demonstrated that athletes who consumed alcohol once a week reported more than twice as many sport-related injuries as did nondrinkers.

Drinking alcohol also has an adverse effect on bone density. Alcohol may delay the healing of stress fractures and athletes who drink alcohol are more prone to develop stress fractures.