Coconut Water – An Alternative to Your Sports Drink?

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If you’re not already drinking coconut water, I wanted to share with you some of its benefits as many are starting to consider this as a potential sports drink. Coconut water is a natural drink that has everything your average sports drink has and more. It has five times more potassium than Gatorade or Powerade. Whenever you get cramps in your muscles, potassium will help you to get rid of the cramps. It’s a healthy drink that replenishes the nutrients that your body has lost during a moderate workout.

While coconut water is fine after light exercise, the marathon runners and heavy lifters among us may want to stick with Gatorade or Powerade. Coconut water has relatively low sodium compared to traditional sports drinks, meaning it doesn’t measure up in replacing the salt that hardcore athletes lose through sweating through an intense workout. Again, intense exercise is defined by hard exercise longer than one hour.

Still, all the potassium from coconut water could be very beneficial, especially to people that eat a typical unhealthy American diet that's heavy on the salt but light on potassium. It has more potassium than a banana with much less sugar so if you cramp this may be an alternative to try. Coconut water comes from young, often green coconuts - not the mature ones that look like hairy brown bowling balls. The water’s the precursor of the coconut's white, spongy meat, which is often processed to make coconut milk or coconut oil.

Coconut water has five electrolytes your body needs:

1. **Potassium**: The most important positive ion (cation) inside your cells; potassium regulates heartbeat and muscle function; coconut water contains 295 mg, which is 15 times the amount in the average sports drink
2. **Sodium**: The most important positive ion in fluid outside your cells, and also the one most depleted with exercise, as you lose sodium through sweat and urine
3. **Magnesium**: important for maintaining the electrical potential of your cells, proper muscle function, and preventing calcium overload
4. **Phosphorous**: Plays important roles in bone health, but also in transferring energy throughout your body, helping your muscles contract, and regulating nerve function (partners with calcium)
5. **Calcium**: Important for bone health (partners with phosphorous)
Less than one percent of those who use sports drinks actually benefit from them. Most sports drinks are loaded with things you DON’T want, like refined sugars, artificial colors and chemicals, none of which are in natural coconut water. If you exercise for 30 minutes a day at a moderate to high intensity, **fresh, pure water is the best thing to help you stay hydrated.** It’s only when you’ve been exercising for longer periods, such as for more than 60 minutes, or in the heat, or at extreme intensity levels, where you are sweating profusely, that you may need something more than water to replenish your body.

Besides plain water, coconut water is one of the best and safest option to rehydrate yourself after a strenuous workout. If you need the electrolytes, it will provide them. If you don’t need them, then it certainly won’t hurt you. And as you’re learning, coconut water has a mountain of other health benefits in addition to rehydration, which commercial sports drink don’t routinely provide. Depending on how much salt you’ve lost through sweating, you might even add a tiny pinch of salt to your glass of coconut water.

A separate study of 12 male athletes published in January in the Journal of the International Society of Sports Nutrition found that coconut water had about the same rehydration benefits as sports drinks or pure water after the subjects ran on treadmills for an hour. Of note however, these drinks did have a small amount (a pinch) of salt added

**In Summary:**

If you exercise harder than one hour such as practices and games, stick with your “...ade” drink. If you are a “cramer” then perhaps try coconut water with a pinch of salted added since it has extra potassium. If you exercise less than this, water will do but coconut water is an alternative with additional health benefits.

**Remember to**

1. Always plan ahead for what you are going to eat
2. Obtain adequate amounts of protein
3. Work on Flexibility
4. Supplement your diet with a fish oil and multi-vitamin

Let me know if I can help. Email me at architechsports@gmail.com

God Bless,

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