School Lunchroom Staple — An Ideal Sports Drink?

For years, athletes and those engaging in extended vigorous exercise have reached for one of the well-known commercial recovery drinks. These drinks are carefully formulated to replenish electrolytes lost during prolonged physical activity. Basically, they contain carbohydrates (some form of sugar such as glucose, fructose or sucrose) along with electrolytes like sodium and potassium—replacement for those nutrients that have been excreted through perspiration that occurs during endurance or strenuous exercise.

A new use for an old favorite?

Chocolate milk, a longtime favorite drink in school cafeterias, has taken on a new role as a sport recovery drink. Not only is it well-suited for rehydration, but it also offers an ideal ratio of carbohydrates to protein, important for refueling muscles after exertion. Several small studies with athletes, such as one with cyclists at Indiana University (2006), have found that chocolate milk is just as good as popular commercial alternatives in recovery from strenuous exercise. Recently, a study published in the Journal of the International Society of Sports Nutrition (Dec 2008) found that for muscle recovery among soccer player subjects, drinks with a carbohydrate-protein mix, such as that found in milk, are effective post-exercise rehydration beverages and may even help reduce exercise-induced muscle damage.

Keith Ayoob, RD and associate professor of pediatrics at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, calls chocolate milk a sports drink ‘plus.’ Roberta Anding, RD and spokesperson for the American Dietetics Association, recommends chocolate milk to her young athlete clients, saying that it makes good sense to take advantage of an excellent recovery drink that is inexpensive, effective and provides some nutrients that many young people are not getting enough of—calcium and vitamin D.

What is the take-home message for consumers?

Although commercial recovery beverages do the job, the edge for chocolate milk may come from its protein content that encourages muscle recovery. In addition, a real bonus the nutrient-dense chocolate milk offers is calcium and vitamin D that children’s and teens’ diets typically lack.


(Nutrition Facts using nonfat skin chocolate milk)
For more information about healthy eating, contact your local extension office.

The Food Assistance Program can help people of all ages with low income buy nutritious foods for a better diet.

To find out more, call toll-free 1-888-369-4777.

Contents of this publication may be freely reproduced for educational purposes. All other rights reserved.

In each case, credit Karen Hudson, MEd, RD, LD, Family Nutrition Program Coordinator, Department of Human Nutrition; Kansas State University; School Lunchroom Staple—An Ideal Sports Drink?; August, 2009.

K-State Research and Extension is a short name for the Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service, a program designed to generate and distribute useful knowledge for the well-being of Kansans.

Supported by county, state, federal and private funds, the program has county Extension offices, experiment fields, area Extension offices and regional research centers statewide. Its headquarters is on the K-State campus, Manhattan.

Brand names appearing in this publication are for product identification purposes only.

No endorsement is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products not mentioned.

Kansas State University Agricultural Experiment Station and Cooperative Extension Service, Manhattan, Kansas.

Kansas State University is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Kansas State University, County Extension Councils, Extension Districts, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating.