

Hydration is key. Make sure you're drinking enough water.

All comments or advice we've probably heard or received that sometimes makes the hydration process seem a bit menacing.

That's why when there's a potential solution to speed up the hydration process, people listen. It's also because hydration plays a role in so many facets of life.

- Sports/fitness
- Pregnancy
- Travel
- Immune health
- Fighting illness
- Digestion
- Brain function
- Organ health

And the creators of electrolyte drinks know this. Brands like Gatorade, Prime and Liquid I.V. can be found at countless stores with marketing campaigns geared toward the list above.

What are electrolytes?

"Electrolytes are minerals that are used in our body, so when they dissolve in our body fluids or the water we put them in, they have positive or negative charges. That helps your body maintain balance {in many facets of our health}," says Erica Dawkins, a dietetic intern with OSF HealthCare. "It keeps fluid and nutrients flowing in and out of cells and maintains your nerve function, muscle function, heart rate and blood pressure as well."

Research on electrolytes says they "are essential for basic life functioning." The study, from Isha Shrimanker and Sandeep Bhattari from the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, lists sodium, potassium, calcium, magnesium and many more as electrolytes we consume on a daily basis.

Diving into the label

Using Liquid I.V.'s lemon lime drink mixes as an example, one stick contains 25% of one's daily intake of sodium, and 8% of one's daily intake of potassium. Some boxes will hold 10 or 15 packets within them, containing a powder that can be poured into water, then mixed together. The label says you can get 80% of your daily intake of Vitamin C from one drink mix as well.

Consuming too much sodium and not enough potassium can raise your blood pressure, [according to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention \(CDC\)](#). Fruits and vegetables, seafood and dairy products naturally contain potassium.

There are 11 grams of added sugars in the drink mix, which makes up 22% of your suggested daily intake. This is something to keep in mind, as a diet filled with a lot of added sugars has been connected to weight gain and obesity, Type 2 diabetes and heart disease, the [CDC says](#).

Who could benefit from electrolyte drinks?

"With a good, balanced diet and enough water, you're going to have that electrolyte balance you need," Dawkins says. "On a daily occurrence, the drink mixes are absolutely fine to use, but maybe not necessary all the time. If you are having an illness where you're sweating, vomiting or having diarrhea, or if you're an athlete exercising

at high intensities or long periods of time and sweating a lot, we definitely want to try to use electrolyte drinks in those situations."

Who should be cautious of electrolyte drinks?

"Those kidneys are working extra hard to flush out anything we don't need. Anyone who has kidney conditions where their bodies aren't able to do that, they may want to stay away from these drinks or ask their doctor before they use it," Dawkins says. "Or anyone who is trying to watch their blood sugar, a lot of these products do have some extra carbohydrates and added sugar we want to watch. They aid in the absorption a little bit."

As electrolytes can have an impact on heart rate and blood pressure, Dawkins says those with heart conditions or hypertension (high blood pressure) should be cautious when using these products, because they can add in fluid retention, increase your blood pressure and heart rate. Talk with your cardiologist if you think this may be relevant to you.

Can my kids drink these?

The general recommendation is that children should not begin to drink water until they are at least six months of age. While [Liquid I.V. says](#) their Hydration Multiplier® is designed for kids 1+, it comes with the caveat to speak with your child's pediatrician before introducing this to their diet. Dawkins agrees, adding to make sure to read labels of the product you're considering trying before purchasing it.