

Race drinking

Nearly half of recreational runners may be drinking too much fluid during races, according to a survey of runners by Loyola University Health System researchers. Expert guidelines recommend runners drink only when thirsty. But the Loyola survey found that 36.5% of runners drink according to a preset schedule or to maintain a certain body weight and 8.9% drink as much as possible.

Drinking too much fluid while running can cause a potentially fatal condition called exercise-associated hyponatremia. It occurs when runners drink even when they are not thirsty. Drinking too much during exercise can dilute the sodium content of blood to abnormally low levels.

Drinking only when thirsty will prevent overconsumption of fluids. "It's the safest known way to hydrate during endurance exercise," said Loyola sports medicine physician Dr. James Winger. The study is in the British Journal of Sports Medicine.

Symptoms of hyponatremia can include nausea, vomiting, headache, confusion, loss of energy, muscle weakness, spasms or cramps. In extreme cases, the condition can lead to seizures, unconsciousness, and coma.

