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English 503

5 September 2013

### Hydrate, Hydrate, Hydrate!

As I was attempting to catch my breath during a cross country workout, sweat dripping down my face, I turned to my coach as he was yelling, “Keep running, and grab your bottles! Hydrate!” My hands were trembling as I reached for my water bottle. Trying to run and hydrate at the same time during an interval workout was no easy task. In the middle of a challenging training session, the principal objective consuming my mind is *water*. Water consumes the minds and bodies of distance runners. We understand the importance of keeping our bodies hydrated. In the heat of the day, the body craves water while the mind must be focused on a strong performance. Attention should not only remain on the human body’s need for water but also on the shortage of clean water and the frequency in which we waste resources.

As an athlete, I was continuously instructed by my coach to hydrate all day, including before, during, and after workouts, no matter the circumstances. Distance runners must carry and drink significantly more ounces of water than the average person to remain in prime condition; some runners even own water bottles that can be strapped to their hands to ensure optimal utilization of the resource. Hydration is crucial, and water is the source of a runner’s performance. I recognize the need for constant hydration, especially as an athlete, with the excessive amount of perspiration that is a consequence of the activity. Nevertheless, considering the spoiled circumstances I am accustomed to, I waste more water than I should and am

expending more water than required; I should use only the necessary amount of water that I personally need.

In high school, teams were not provided with water bottles. Therefore, the majority of the time, I would purchase a bottle of water and dispose of the container after every practice, contributing to the vicious cycle of waste and destruction. My coach did not care what form our water came in as long as we were constantly in the process of drinking the substance. In college, teams were given refillable water bottles, and, additionally, hydration was preached every single day. I was encouraged to bring my water bottle everywhere I traveled, including all of my classes, which became problematic during my long courses. If I ever committed the crime of forgetting my water bottle, I would have been strongly suggested to purchase a plastic, disposable water bottle.

The gut-wrenching feeling of your throat burning from dehydration is a sensation that most runners experience. I have experienced dehydration multiple times during my years as a competitive distance runner. The beginning effects made me feel utterly nauseous, resulting in a massive headache. Even though I was perspiring due to the heat, chills overcame my body. My muscles began to cramp, and black spots blurred my vision. My hands commenced to curl and my mouth went numb. I was in a state of semi-consciousness and could no longer run in a straight line. I somehow meandered my way to the finish line and dropped to the ground. One of the alert athletic trainers carried me to the medical tent, where I had to be immediately inserted with an IV to receive fluids. Finally regaining my ground, I realized what had occurred and instantaneously became upset. Breaking out of a dehydrated state utterly wipes out a person; I required a little over twenty-four hours to become fully functional.

Even though my experience of dehydration was horrendous, the sheer fact of knowing that I can return to fresh, clean water after the completion of a workout is a tremendous realization. Unfortunately, places in our country, as well as around the world, are not capable of having these reliefs and the indulgence of clean water used for drinking and bathing. What can we, as a planet, do to sustain the water supply for the good of all humanity? The push to recycle is growing and is a fantastic beginning area, yet everyone must support this initiative.

Being on a team, such as cross country, really brings people together. Running is a bonding experience that was shared by my teammates and me. One of my teammates was not keen on the notion of disposable bottles; consequently, the team developed the habit of recycling through her astute guidance. By seeing through her eyes, I gained a global perspective on environmental matters and really began to question my own judgment. I ascertained that Americans take water and sustainability for granted. Water is necessary to survival for all of mankind, yet most Americans do not realize the water shortage. Unfortunately, I have fallen into this category.

Presently, after the water shortage being brought to my attention and attaining an increasing global knowledge, I am aware of the happenings occurring, simply put, everywhere. I think twice before I reach for a plastic, easily disposable water bottle. From my humble experience of painful running and agonizing dehydration, I realize that more people than necessary suffer from dehydration and a lack of clean water. By grasping my part in the story, I had an epiphany. We, as a whole, need to band together to help others; recycling and water conservation are an essential starting points to help others fulfill their basic needs. I recognize that the sustainability of water is a demanding and challenging commission, yet an immediate change can begin with a single letter, "I."