

May 31, 2007**PHYSICAL CULTURE****For Those Who Sweat, Some Small Stuff**By **SARAH BOWEN SHEA**

To stay hydrated, athletes must replace electrolytes like sodium and potassium that are lost in sweat. But many triathletes and runners prefer to eat their carbohydrates (like chewy bars) instead of gulping Gatorade or Cytomax, carb-loaded drinks with a hint of electrolytes. This long-distance set now has a new option that leaves carbohydrates out of the equation: electrolyte-drink tablets.

Tablet makers figure athletes already eat enough energy bars and gels to meet the roughly 80-gram limit that their bodies can shuttle to their muscles in an hour.

"These tablets are catching on among triathletes," said Duane Franks, a San Francisco-based coach of endurance athletes. "Sports drinks often don't have enough electrolytes in them."

Carbohydrates can be tough for some to stomach midrace, so electrolyte-only drinks are marketed as easy to digest. But our tester, Deborah Shulman, a sports nutritionist in Bellvue, Colo., had stomach upset with half the brands she tried on bike rides of two to three hours. During breaks, Dr. Shulman, who has a Ph.D. in physiology, refilled her water bottles and popped in tablets that fizz like Alka-Seltzer (no stirring needed).

NUUN PORTABLE ELECTROLYTE HYDRATION \$19.50 for three 12-tablet tubes, www.nuun.com. Dr. Shulman liked the new Kona Kola best of the four flavors, but said, in all, "the salt was quite apparent." She had "brief stomach upset after drinking Nuun, but it would quickly dissipate" and it didn't interfere with her workouts. After cycling, she was "less dehydrated than" she was with other tablets, possibly because Nuun has the highest sodium and potassium levels.

CAMELBAK ELIXIR \$9.95 for 12-tablet tube, www.rei.com. Introduced in April, Elixir has "excellent digestibility." It didn't give Dr. Shulman the "stomach lurch" she got with Nuun and Zym. Its lemon-lime flavor "was the lightest and most pleasant" of all those tested, and Dr. Shulman liked how it "remained light as the liquid got warmer" during a ride, instead of becoming saltier, as the Nuun did. Elixir dissolved the fastest — in 90 seconds.

ZYM PORTABLE ELECTROLYTE DRINK \$23.49 for three 10-tablet tubes, www.gozym.com. Zym tablets were Dr. Shulman's least favorite. They left her mouth feeling "coated with thick spit" and also gave her "some stomach upset every time." (She suspected magnesium was the culprit.) Zym did, however, keep her "well hydrated," but Dr. Shulman thought the six added vitamins and four electrolytes were "an overkill of ingredients."

MOTOR TABS FLUID REPLACEMENT SYSTEM \$27.99 for 24 tablets, www.motortabs.com. These jumbo tablets were the tester's favorite. "They were the easiest on the stomach, had the best flavor and left a nice, clean, slightly bitter taste," she said. The only product with carbohydrates, Motor Tabs helps maintain energy, but its 16 grams had to be supplemented. The individually wrapped tablets "crumbled when jammed into a pack."

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