

Drink

The answer pits Gatorade against Accelerade, which contains protein, and Seifert claims no allegiance to either sports drink. He also offers an unsolicited disclaimer: He spent four years working in research for Gatorade.

Clinical research years ago showed the benefits that added protein can have.

But Gatorade has been the big thing for years, he said, making it difficult to change people's perceptions about what is the best formula for athletes.

His study used 13 subjects who cycled until they had lost 2.5 percent of their body weight.

They then drank Gatorade, Accelerade or flavored water in an amount equal to the body weight they lost.

He found the athletes who drank

Accelerade retained 15 percent more fluid than those who drank Gatorade and 40 percent more fluid than those who drank water during the three-hour, post-exercise recovery time. The difference is that protein helps increase water absorption and affects the activity in individual muscle cells, Seifert said. The results probably are more applicable to serious athletes seeking an edge, rather than the casual exerciser who runs a few miles a week. Or maybe not, Seifert said.

"I've been asked if 15 percent really matters," he said. "And I ask if you can get 15 percent better mileage on your car, would you like that?"

Not just brand battle

Trainers keep a close eye on core temperatures and getting fluids into sweating athletes.

"The biggest thing we watch for is too much carbohydrates or protein because then the body shifts from absorption to digestion," said Scott Bierscheid, head athletic trainer at St. John's University.

He encourages athletes to drink plenty of water, which is what is most teams drink during and after competition, he said.

Studies about sports drinks aren't going to get him to jump on any new bandwagon, he said, although he said he was interested in Seifert's findings.

"And cost is an issue," he said. "Is the school going to pay for (a sports drink) or is (the athlete)?"

Seifert's study also showed that taste isn't an issue with protein drinks, which have been criticized as "chalky" and therefore more difficult to consume at the levels needed to properly rehydrate.

The subjects in Seifert's study found no difference in taste acceptability among the beverages tested, he said.

At St. Cloud State, some teams have switched to Accelerade, he said, and he has gotten periodic calls from members of running and cycling clubs from outside the area who want to know more.

"I think there's a whole mixed bag out there," he said of the acceptance of adding protein to a sports drink. "I don't see any one group pooh-pooing it. A lot of people don't realize that adding a bit of protein can have a benefit."