



Hi-Tech Hydration Makes Its Way Indoors

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Many experts in the nutrition and sports field continue to remind us that water is the most important fluid necessary to maintain bodily functions and to fuel exercisers. However, one study shows that almost 70 percent of us are chronically dehydrated. Why don't exercisers drink enough? Some forget while others say it's inconvenient to carry a water bottle or isn't an integral part of their routine.

Whatever the reason, the bottom line is that most exercisers simply don't hydrate enough. Because many athletic outdoor activities don't have a readily available water source, a product revolution was created years ago for climbers, bikers, mountaineers, long-distance runners and military personnel: portable, "hands-free" hydration systems that are lightweight, wearable, sanitary and highly functional. Now their utility and ease of use are causing these systems to transition from outdoors to indoors.

Essentially, hydration systems come in two varieties: lightweight backpacks with a water reservoir or bladder and waist packs with the same characteristics. Users simply fill the reservoirs, strap the units onto their bodies, and position the hose close to their mouths so that they can access it during workouts. When users need to hydrate, they simply turn their heads slightly, "bite" the valve gently and suck. The concept makes so much sense that I am surprised it has taken so long to transition indoors.

The technology has evolved greatly in the past three years. Bladders are easier to clean, sanitary, more comfortable and available in a variety of designs for various activities. Some of the utilitarian models simply carry a water bladder while others can store extra gym equipment and other personal items. In each case the system comes with a removable, cleanable bladder that holds water, and a flexible tube that allows exercisers to drink water without reaching for anything at any point in their workout. The outer materials are made of high-quality, breathable, lightweight nylon or cordura that is washable and durable.

I would call Camelbak Inc. the largest and most innovative manufacturer of personal hydration systems (although it is being joined by companies such as Dakine and Deuter). Camelbak makes more than 20 models, and we tested the six that offer the most variety for trainers and clients. The newer systems were virtually flawless. Fluids stayed cold, and the systems were comfortable to wear even during intense exercise. In fact, after one to two workouts clients and trainers reported that the system became part of their normal attire, and they almost forgot they were wearing them. The systems proved close fitting, making the user feel that they did not have extra gear flapping around while they performed their cardiovascular exercise. Most importantly, their ease of access encourages hydration.

Special features on many of the systems include:

- Insulated tubes that keep fluids cold (and prevent freezing during outdoor activities).
- Patented "bite valves" to open the waterway and prevent leaking when users don't want water.
- Wide variety of reservoir sizes from 25 ounces to 120 ounces.
- Comfortable materials that breathe and wick perspiration.
- Form-fitting designs.
- Storage options for food, keys, etc.
- Popular colors and materials in a variety of options.
- Washable bladders that are silicone treated with an antimicrobial layer to keep them free of germs.
- Variety of volume and storage options.
- Lightweight, breathable and with shoulder and waist harnesses to fit a variety of users.
- New generation fill-systems that allow easy refills at drinking fountains.
- No plastic aftertaste — a problem with earlier models.

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