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HEADLINE: Post-workout research reveals a pleasant surprise

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BODY:

When a workout wipes you out, what do you do for a lift? Guzzle Gatorade? Drain the nearest water bottle? Or soothe your parched palate with a shot of chocolate milk?

If you opt for the latter, you may be part of an oncoming trend in the refueling-for-fitness market. Newly published research is telling us that sweaty brows and chocolate-milk mustaches should go together like carbohydrates and protein.

Maybe Olympic champion swimmer Michael Phelps, the winner of six gold medals in 2004, had the right idea when he slurped down Carnation Instant Breakfast between races.

Proving that perhaps things go better with cocoa (a key ingredient in chocolate milk), research published in the February edition of International Journal of Sport Nutrition and Exercise strongly supports low-fat chocolate milk as a post-workout beverage.

Athletes who drink the beverage after an intense bout of exercise were able to workout about 50 percent longer and with greater intensity during a second session compared with athletes who consumed Endurox R4, a traditional fluid-replacement beverage.

To be sure, chocolate milk was not the far-and-away winner. Gatorade proved just as effective among the cyclists monitored in the Indiana University study.

Joel M. Stager, co-author of the study and a professor of kinesiology at Indiana University, said the study shows that chocolate milk is "a strong alternative to other commercial sports drinks in helping athletes recover from strenuous, energy-depleting exercise."

Researchers theorize that the combination of protein and carbohydrates found in chocolate milk is the key to reviving depleted glycogen stores. The carb-protein ratio is an exemplary 4:1.

If there's another advantage for chocolate milk over traditional sports drinks, it's that it is more cost effective and contains more vitamin D and calcium.

Calorically, however, low-fat chocolate contains about 157 calories per eight ounces. The same amount of Gatorade has about 50 calories.

For the lactose intolerant - those unable to properly digest regular milk - chocolate milk may be preferable, some studies suggest. The key is cocoa, which has shown in studies to be well tolerated by those with lactose intolerance.

Stager first presented his studies on chocolate milk nearly two years ago at the American College of Sports Medicine Conference in Indianapolis. "We found that one of the greatest things athletes can do for themselves a half hour to an hour following exercise is drink chocolate milk," he told the Bloomington Times-Herald.

His findings were so provocative that conference attendees peppered him with questions for two hours after his presentation.

As for chocolate milk's advantage over plain milk as a recovery drink, carbohydrates are the key. A cup of low-fat chocolate milk contains 52 grams of carbs compared with a little more than 12 for low-fat plain milk.

The emergence of chocolate milk as a viable sports drink alternative comes at a time when children are being encouraged to substitute empty-calorie soft drinks for something more substantial. Studies published in early March indicate that soda and other sugar-sweetened drinks cause obesity - both in children and adults.

Two years ago, California became the first state in the nation to ban the sale of soft drinks in middle and elementary schools. The ban later was extended to high schools.

Beginning in July 2007, California students will be restricted to buying water, milk, and some fruit and sports drinks that have limited sweeteners.

Meanwhile, potential consumers of chocolate milk might be encouraged by this finding, published nearly two years ago in the journal *Obesity Research*: Obese and overweight adults on a reduced-calorie diet who consumed three to four servings of milk or milk products lost an average of 24 pounds in 24 weeks - significantly more than those who also cut calories but drank little or no milk.

Dietary calcium and dairy products accelerate weight and fat loss during energy restriction in obese adults, the researchers concluded.

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