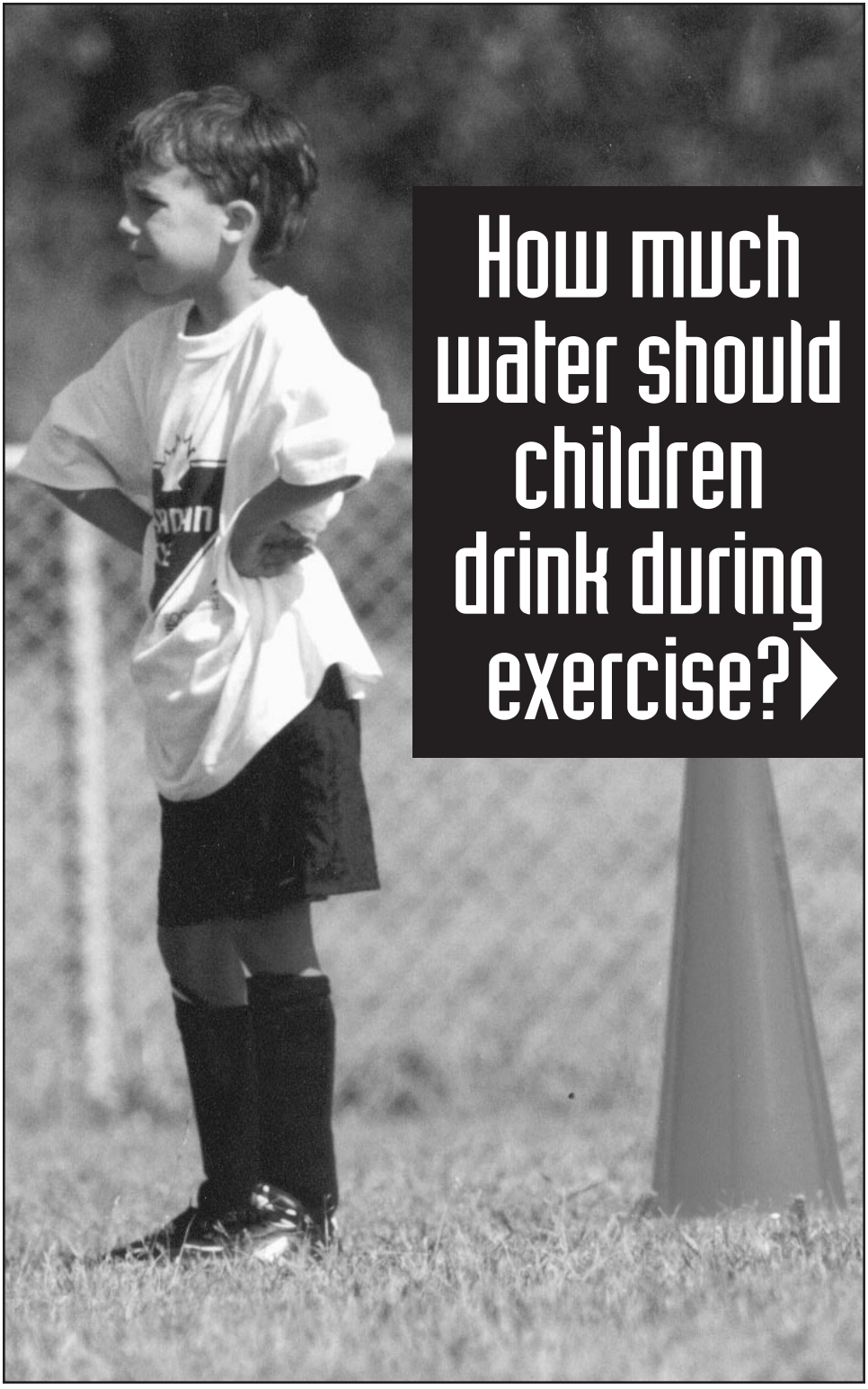

Canadian Soccer Association

The human body needs fluid to function. During exercise, children and adults lose body fluids, primarily through sweat. This water must be replaced to avoid dehydration. Oded Bar-Or, a research physician at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ont., says most people underestimate how much fluid they need to replace. How thirsty you are doesn't tell you how much you need to drink.

When fluids are not replaced during exercise, body temperature starts to rise. And because body temperature rises faster in children than in adults, young athletes must drink enough fluid to prevent dehydration.

Children need to drink every 15 or 20 minutes when they are exercising or even just playing in the playground, says Bar-Or. If it is hot and humid, children should go to the sidelines regularly to take a few sips of cool water. On each of these occasions, they should drink until they are no longer thirsty. Then, if they are under 10 years of age, encourage children to drink another half-cup. If older than 10 years of age, children should drink another cup.

The amount of fluid each child needs depends on body size, how hot and humid it is, and how hard he or she is exercising. “Teaching children to drink beyond thirst will prevent dehydration. Because physical activity suppresses the thirst mechanism, children need to be reminded to drink frequently,” says Bar-Or.

You can tell if a child is dehydrated by checking the color of the urine. If the urine is dark and there is little of it, the child needs to replace lost fluids. Giving them a little too much water won’t harm them, says Bar-Or. It will only make them go to the bathroom.

Studies conducted in Bar-Or‘s laboratory show that children will drink 45 per cent more water if it is flavoured. He suggests that parents flavour the water if it means children will drink more. Be sure that any flavouring added to the water is low in sugar and salt content.

If fruit juice is consumed during activity, it should be diluted with water. Most juice has too much sugar and will not be absorbed very effectively unless it is diluted. A mixture of two or three parts water to one part juice has been found to be effective.