There is nothing quite like the ability of a sports drink to quench thirst and dehydration after being outside enjoying the summer sun. Sport drinks, such as Gatorade and Powerade, are used by athletes, active travelers and parents, as well as those recovering from a sickness. These drinks are very similar to electrolytes given to animals to prevent and treat dehydration.

“Electrolytes are various salts which have different and important functions in an animal’s body,” says Dr. Barry Kleppe of Waunakee Veterinary Service, SC. “Often, these salts are added to water to make an electrolyte solution, commonly called electrolytes.”

Large animals receive electrolytes to restore and maintain hydration, as well as to correct electrolyte imbalances in the body. Depending on the animal’s age and size, different quantities of electrolytes are given.

“Veterinarians give electrolytes to properly balance an animal’s electrolytes [already] in their body, or to rehydrate the animal,” Dr. Kleppe says.

“Electrolytes contain different salts of sodium, potassium, calcium, magnesium, chloride, and other elements and compounds,” states Dr. Kleppe. These are mixed with water to make solutions of electrolytes. Animal owners can purchase salts as a dry packet and add them to water, or may purchase an electrolyte solution.

According to Dr. Kleppe, electrolytes help maintain health in an animal’s body. Electrolytes can be especially helpful when animals are sick or giving birth.

A veterinarian’s role is to assist animal owners in making decisions on when and how to use electrolytes.

“Veterinarians provide advice that includes medical treatment, animal husbandry, and nutrition to help keep animals healthy,” explains Dr. Kleppe.

Veterinarians and animal owners work together every day to keep their animals healthy, and electrolytes are just one tool to do so. The next time you consume a sports drink, remember that animals may need a similar, rehydrating drink.

To learn more about electrolytes for animals, contact your local WVMA member veterinarian. Find one online at www.wvma.org .