



Supplements and Sports Foods Policy



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Sports supplements are commonly used by athletes in the hope of maximising the benefits of participating in sport. Understandably, there is considerable confusion about the issues around sports supplements, but it must always be remembered that there are risks associated with their use and they should never be seen as a substitute for good nutrition.

The global supplement industry is enormous and the Irish Sports Council cannot be a regulatory agency for that industry, now or in the future. It recognises that sports supplements are legal and are widely used but is providing this information so that athletes can make the best decisions on using supplements.

The Irish Sports Council recommends against the use of sports supplements because it believes that:

- > a correct dietary and nutritional regime will provide all the potential benefits of sports supplements.
- > elite athletes are opening up the possibility of inadvertent positive tests by taking supplements, given the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) rule on strict liability.
- > it is inappropriate for any junior athlete or player to be taking supplements that could have an impact on their physical development.

Factsheets on a range of sports supplements outlining the potential benefits and risks of these products have been developed in line with this policy. Each factsheet is supported by a more in depth technical document which may be of interest to dieticians, sports physicians etc. Factsheets can be accessed on

www.instituteofsport.ie/Institute_Of_Sport/Athlete_Zone/Performance_Nutrition

Nutrition:

There is no substitute for good nutritional advice and an over reliance on supplements may lead to neglect of proper nutrition.

Use of supplements is not a substitute for good nutrition and is not a short cut to good nutrition. Indeed in the vast majority of cases, putting good nutritional advice into practice will eliminate any need for supplements.

In the context of a carefully monitored situation (i.e. under the guidance of an appropriately qualified nutritionist/dietician), there is evidence that some supplements may be of benefit in improving athletic performance.

Supplements and the Prohibited List:

Several studies have shown that a significant proportion of supplements available on the market are contaminated with substances which are on the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) Prohibited List. A scientifically verified study has shown that on examination of supplements bought from various sources, up to 14.8%* of the supplements were contaminated with undeclared substances which were on the WADA Prohibited List.

If an athlete takes a supplement which contains a prohibited substance and this subsequently results in a positive drugs test, it is not an adequate defence to state that the athlete was unaware of the presence of the prohibited substance in the supplement in question.

Under WADA's strict liability rule, athletes are responsible for any substance that may be found in their bodies. It does not matter how it got there.

If you wish to report a supplement or sports food that you have concerns about, please contact that Food Safety Authority of Ireland, Abbey Court, Lower Abbey Street, Dublin 1, Ireland. Tel: + 353 1 817 1300, Fax +353 1 817 1301, Email info@fsai.ie

Risks/impact on younger athletes:

Particular age groups may be more at risk in relation to supplements - adolescents in particular who use muscle bulking agents are at risk of developing potentially career ending injuries caused by ruptures of the tendonous insertion of over developed muscles into an immature skeleton. The use of muscle bulking agents in adolescents and teenagers in particular, is strongly discouraged on health grounds.

Dietary supplements and Ergogenic aids

Dietary supplements are those which contain nutrient profiles close to what could be found in everyday foods. Common examples used in sport include:

- > sports drinks
- > protein and carbohydrate powders
- > vitamin and mineral supplements
- > meal replacements
- > sports bars and gels.

These products may provide an easy and convenient way of meeting nutritional requirements which may be increased following intense exercise when compared to the general public.

Nutritional ergogenic aids contain nutrients found in amounts far greater than would be typically found in everyday foods. These aids claim to have a direct work-enhancing effect on performance. Many ergogenic aids rely on theoretical or anecdotal evidence rather than sound scientific evidence of benefit.

The production, marketing and sale of these supplements is a very large multi-million euro international business which up until recently was largely unregulated. Despite the entry into force in 2002 of EU regulations controlling supplements as foods, there are still a large number of sports supplements and sports foods which are not controlled and feature unsubstantiated or exaggerated claims on their efficacy. Due to the newness of regulation, industrial hygiene standards associated in the production of many supplements vary considerably while the accuracy of labelling of the ingredients of many supplements cannot be guaranteed.

Risks associated with supplements:

Due to the possibility of inaccurate labelling of some supplements athletes cannot guarantee the content of what they are ingesting and may be putting their health at risk, by either; (a) taking substances that are in themselves harmful and may even be counter-productive in terms of performance or; (b) taking excessively large amounts of vitamins and/or minerals which may give rise to health problems.

Many supplements and sports foods are quite expensive; if the basic nutrition and hydration processes are not correct then they will be of no benefit. Very often athletes will waste money on products and can be in danger of creating a culture of over-reliance on pharmaceutical agents in a culture where drug abuse is increasingly prevalent.

The WADA Prohibited List is not definitive - it defines classes of prohibited substances, hence the WADA Prohibited List cannot act as a checklist for screening supplements. Screening cannot guard against contamination by new unknown contaminants and is restricted by the limits of detection of the screening. Batch testing, for instance, is considered inadequate, as usually only samples part of a product...and that may be the part that doesn't contain a contaminant.

Beware of misleading product information that suggests that products are screened in any way by WADA or screened at WADA-Accredited Labs (which are not permitted to test or screen supplements for substances on the WADA Prohibited List).

In Summary:

Do:

- > Remember that there is a variable level of risk associated with supplements. Vitamins and minerals produced by reputable pharmaceutical companies especially those with a marketing authorisation number such as a product authorisation (PA) number are less likely to be associated with health risks or inadvertent drug tests.
- > Check if these products are listed on www.eirpharm.com or 'Medication Checker' App for smartphones (for products bought in the Republic of Ireland) or www.globaldro.com (for products bought in Northern Ireland).
- > Follow a dietary plan that will allow you to adapt your eating and drinking practices to maximise your performance.
- > Seek advice from a professional such as a Sports Dietician (e.g. a Member of the Irish Nutrition and Dietetic Institute MINDI, www.indi.ie) before taking any supplement.
- > Make sure that the professional is familiar with the WADA Prohibited List.
- > Remember that dietary alteration may replace the need for any particular supplement.
- > Be aware that supplements which claim to be muscle building or fat burning are more likely to be associated with contamination with anabolic steroids, stimulants and other contaminants.
- > Always remember that there are no quick fixes for improving sports performance.

In Summary:

Do Not:

- > Do not take a supplement just because a team mate or a competitor is taking it or recommends it.
- > Do not take any supplements made by a company which also manufactures substances which are on the WADA Prohibited List due to the risk of cross contamination.
- > Do not take any supplements that make claims that sound too good to be true. Always validate product claims through non-biased sources.
- > Do not take any supplements made by a company which in the past has been associated with positive drugs tests.
- > Do not buy supplements either over the internet or through magazines as they are more likely to be associated with an increased risk of inadvertent doping, adverse health effects and other associated problems.
- > Do not exceed the recommended dose - Remember more is not always better. Excessive use of one vitamin or mineral can have a negative impact on the availability or absorption of another. The recommended daily allowances (RDA) for vitamins and minerals should be used as a guide in determining nutritional needs.

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