

Use of dietary supplements is popular among all levels of athletes; however, supplements are not strictly regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and can be harmful to your body. It is important to be aware of the risks related to dietary supplements before deciding to take one.

## WHAT IS A DIETARY SUPPLEMENT?

Dietary supplements are used for various reasons. Some dietary supplements are products intended to add more nutritional value to the diet while others are used to enhance athletic performance. Dietary supplements include, but are not limited to: vitamins, minerals, herbs, amino acids, enzymes, and substances such as organ tissues and hormones. Some athletes take dietary supplements in an attempt to increase performance, gain muscle mass, or lose weight even though scientific research often does not support these claims. Examples of common dietary supplements used by athletes include steroids, protein powders, amino acids, caffeine, and creatine. Many athletes taking these products are looking for immediate effects and do not think about the negative side effects some of these substances can have on the body.

## RISKS OF TAKING SUPPLEMENTS

Dietary supplements do not have to be reviewed or proven safe and/or effective before being put on the shelves and marketed for use. They are not regulated during manufacturing, which means there is never complete certainty of the ingredients. Supplements may be contaminated or intentionally spiked with illegal substances, such as steroids, during manufacturing that can lead to positive drug or anti-doping testing.

Dietary supplements can cause negative and potentially serious health problems (e.g. organ damage, malnutrition), ultimately decreasing athletic performance. They can also cause dangerous interactions with certain prescription medications. Before taking any supplements it is important to talk with your doctor.

Consuming dietary supplements often ends up being a waste of time and money since a lot of the products don't actually improve athletic performance or health, regardless of what the label claims.

## Supplement Facts

Since the FDA does not regulate dietary supplements it is important to educate yourself before taking one. Visit the following sites for information on supplements:

- [www.supplement411.org](http://www.supplement411.org)
- [www.usantidoping.org](http://www.usantidoping.org)
- [www.drugfreesport.com](http://www.drugfreesport.com)

There is never complete certainty of the ingredients in a dietary supplement; therefore, some organizations provide independent testing, also known as third party testing, to evaluate a supplement's ingredients. This can reduce the risk of using an unsafe or contaminated product. Not all third party testing companies are the same; check to make sure they are credible and have appropriate certifications before using one. Visit the following websites for more information on third party testing:

- [www.nsf sport.com](http://www.nsf sport.com)
- [www.informed-choice.org](http://www.informed-choice.org)
- [www.consumerlab.com](http://www.consumerlab.com)
- [www.hfl.co.uk](http://www.hfl.co.uk)
- [www.usp.org](http://www.usp.org)



## BANNED SUBSTANCES

Many athletic associations create a list of banned substances that their athletes are prohibited from consuming. A lot of dietary supplements are on banned substances lists or contain ingredients that are. Lists of banned substances may be different from one athletic association to another, so it is important to find the list for the association you participate in. When looking for banned substances in a dietary supplement read the ingredients list very closely, and remember that many supplements are contaminated with banned and/or illegal substances that may not be declared on the label. It is important to be well informed and aware that you are taking the supplement at your own risk.

If you plan on playing lacrosse in college the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) publishes a list of banned substances every year and randomly tests their athletes for these substances. If you take a supplement with a banned substance (knowingly or unknowingly) you risk losing eligibility. Visit the NCAA website, [www.ncaa.org/health-and-safety](http://www.ncaa.org/health-and-safety), for more information about dietary supplements and banned substances.

## CHOOSE FOOD FIRST!

As their name implies, dietary supplements are intended for supplementing the body and should never take the place of food. Dietary supplements cannot make up for a bad diet. A well balanced diet can provide all the nutrients the body needs for optimal athletic performance. There may be a few conditions when taking a dietary supplement is advised. For example, if you have a nutrient deficiency and your doctor recommends taking a dietary supplement (e.g. vitamin, mineral) to correct the deficiency.

If you choose to take a dietary supplement and experience an adverse effect it is important to report the event. Adverse events or reactions can be reported to the supplement manufacturer or the FDA. Supplement manufacturers are required by law to notify the FDA of serious adverse event reports. To report directly to the FDA visit this website [www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements/ReportAdverseEvent/](http://www.fda.gov/Food/DietarySupplements/ReportAdverseEvent/) and follow the links.

## Be Aware

While there are responsible dietary supplement manufacturers there are also dishonest manufacturers that make supplements spiked with dangerous and banned substances and then market them as safe and healthy. It is your responsibility to educate yourself and use caution when choosing to take dietary supplements. The only way to eliminate the risk involved with taking dietary supplements is to completely avoid their use. Some athletes still insist on using them. The following tips can help reduce the risk to some degree:

- *Meet with a sports dietitian and/or other appropriate health professional and discuss why you think you need a supplement.*
- *Avoid supplements with known banned substances as well as supplements made by a company that handles banned substances.*
- *Look out for ingredients ending in -ol, -diol, -stene, or numbers because these may be steroids.*
- *Be cautious of proprietary blends because the amount of each ingredient in the blend is not declared.*
- *Steer clear of "too good to be true" claims.*
- *Look for supplements that have been verified by a third party testing agency and know what type of testing that agency did.*

