



Athlete Use of Nutritional Supplements – British Swimming Guidelines

These guidelines are applicable to all athletes of the six aquatic disciplines who enter domestic and/or international competition at any level of their sport. Coaches, support staff, parents and others who may be asked about the use of nutritional supplements by athletes should also familiarise themselves with this document.

A high quality diet, together with performance-focused nutritional practices, play a fundamental role in supporting training, recovery and performance for all athletes. Elite athletes, in particular (referred to here as an athlete on a World Class or a Talent Programme) should optimise all areas of performance, including training, recovery, injury prevention, diet and lifestyle. Clearly, at this level of performance, the use of carefully selected, scientifically proven and quality-assured nutritional supplements can contribute to maximising an athlete's performance potential.

Nutritional Supplements

"A food, food component, nutrient, or non-food compound that is purposefully ingested in addition to the habitually-consumed diet with the aim of achieving a specific health and/or performance benefit." (International Olympic Committee 2018).

It is recognised that nutritional supplements can come in many forms from functional foods (e.g. vitamin-enriched foods), sports foods providing energy or nutrients in a more convenient form than normal foods (e.g. carbohydrate gel), isolated or single nutrients (e.g. Vitamin C pill) or multi-ingredient products (e.g. multivitamin capsule or meal-replacement drink).

However, it is clear from the definition above that a supplement is considered to be a product which is consumed in addition to the habitually-consumed diet with specific intent.

For more information about the definition between a food, fortified food and nutritional supplement see the BDA's Nutritional Supplement Position Statement.

Key Principles

- Food-first, but not food only. British Swimming promotes a 'food-first' approach to nutrition where food and fluid solutions are sought to improve health and performance before supplements are considered. However, it is recognised that there are times when a food-only solution is not the most appropriate for the athlete's health or performance. In such situations, under the guidance of the Nutrition and/or Medical Team, supplements may be utilised.
- Nutritional supplements should only be used under the advice of an SENr (Sport and Exercise Nutrition Register) registered nutritionist or appropriate medical professional who have knowledge of the nutritional needs and anti-doping regulations of athletes.



- Nutritional supplements are not normally recommended for athletes under the age of 18 unless advised by an appropriate medical professional.
- Athletes must take responsibility for all substances, including nutritional supplements, which they ingest (see “Supplements and Anti-Doping” below). As such they should follow the guidelines set out below at “Minimising the Risk and Making Informed Choices”.
- Athletes (and coaches, parents, and others involved in the sport) should act responsibly in their use and/or recommendation of nutritional supplements. In particular they should not irresponsibly share products, pressure any other athlete into using nutritional supplements, or promote or advocate the use of nutritional supplements to athletes in a way which is contrary to the principles above.

Supplements and Anti-Doping

All athletes – elite or otherwise - must be aware that the aquatic disciplines are governed by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) policy of “**Strict Liability.**” This means that **each individual athlete is solely responsible for any substance they use, attempt to use or that is found in their system, regardless of how the substance got into their system, even if the substance was taken inadvertently and even if there was no intention to cheat.**

Research suggests that nutritional supplements can contain prohibited substances and therefore consumption of a supplement risks inadvertent ingestion of a prohibited substance. Typically, this risk presents through four different sources:

1. The product contains a prohibited substance (whether listed on the ingredient label or not)
2. The product lists a prohibited substance on the ingredient label under a different name
3. The product has been contaminated during the manufacturing process
4. The product is a counterfeit product and does not contain the ingredients stated on the label

Therefore, all athletes must consider these known risks and their consequences relating to anti-doping before deciding to take supplements.

Minimising the Risk and Making Informed Choices

Athletes can take steps to minimise the risk of inadvertent consumption of a prohibited substance.

British Swimming recommends that all supplement products should be independently screened for prohibited substances by an accredited laboratory prior to use. Whilst there is a growing number of laboratories offering this testing, British Swimming supports the **Informed-Sport** programme, which helps athletes to minimise the risk of using a supplement containing a prohibited substance. UK Anti-Doping and UK Sport also advocate the use of the Informed-Sport programme to help athletes fulfil their anti-doping obligations.



Informed-Sport is a risk minimisation programme for sports nutrition products, suppliers to the sports nutrition industry and supplement manufacturing facilities. The programme certifies that every batch of a supplement product that bears the Informed-Sport logo has been tested for prohibited substances. Any batch-lines found to contain prohibited substances are not granted Informed-Sport status.

Athletes can check whether a supplement has been tested for the presence of prohibited substances by entering the product batch number at www.informed-sport.com.

Athletes should be aware that Informed-Sport status is granted on a product-by-product basis and **not** granted to all of a manufacturer's products. Therefore, athletes should diligently check each individual product and not assume that because a manufacturer has Informed-Sport status for one product that it applies to all products in that manufacturer's range. Similarly athletes should not assume a product they have previously used and have checked with Informed-Sport is ok to use when they obtain a new pack. Each batch number of each product/pack an athlete proposes to ingest should be checked.

However, no certification programme can 100% guarantee that a supplement does not contain a prohibited substance(s): there is no guarantee against an inadvertent doping violation and the principle of 'Strict Liability' always applies.

Athletes are encouraged to undertake their own due diligence checks, for example;

- Assess the reputation of the manufacturer
- Assess the marketing claims of the product
- Assess the efficacy of the product

Support from the Nutrition and Medical Teams can be provided here.

Athletes should note that if they commit an anti-doping rule violation as a result of consumption of a prohibited substance from a nutritional supplement then it is the **responsibility of the athlete** to provide evidence that:

- The product was contaminated;
- Due diligence has been undertaken before taking the product; and
- Whether the product was batch-tested and part of a risk minimisation programme.

As such athletes should always note batch test numbers and record products used within the last 7 days on the doping control form when subject to doping control testing.



Seeking Expert Advice for Maximum Performance Benefits

In addition to the risks relating to anti-doping, athletes are frequently exposed to commercial marketing claiming a supplements' benefits to health and/or performance that sometimes have no scientific or clinical basis.

Where an athlete chooses to use supplements, guidance should first be sought from SENr registered nutritionists or medical practitioners in order to carefully select a supplement that has been proven to provide a health or performance related benefit (see the Supplement Use Decision Matrix in the BDA's Nutritional Supplement Position Statement – Page 13).

Elite athletes on British Swimming World Class and Talent programmes should follow the advice and recommendations of programme nutritionists and/or its medical practitioners.

Endorsing Nutritional Supplements

If an athlete, coach or support staff is approached by the producers of nutritional supplements to endorse their products and/or enter into a sponsorship agreement, British Swimming advises:

- Conduct due diligence on the company and their products: is the company a responsible producer, which uses the Informed-Sport programme?
- Take legal advice to ensure that what you're being asked to do or how you promote the product will not be contrary to any advertising rules and/or codes of conduct (Dietary claims are a closely regulated area).
- Be responsible in the way in which you promote a product. For example, targeting a promotion at under 18s, or giving the impression that use of a supplement is essential for, or a shortcut to, improved performance would be inappropriate. Be particularly careful on social media where a more informal approach is often adopted and/or there are constraints on the detail provided to convey a message.

British Swimming's Management of Nutritional Supplements

British Swimming adopts industry-approved guidance on the management of nutritional supplements. This guidance covers:

- Sourcing: Only sourcing products which meet batch-testing risk minimisation criteria.
- Storage: Safe and secure storage to prevent spoilage and unsolicited access.
- Record Keeping: Stock and distribution databases.
- Distribution: Records of any products provided to athletes
- Transport: Standards for transporting nutritional supplements
- Disposal: Appropriate disposal of nutritional supplements.

KEY POINTS FOR ALL ATHLETES

- **No Guarantees** – Nutritional supplements come with associated risks: some prohibited substances may not appear on the ingredients label; the product label may list substances



- under a different name to that given on the Prohibited List; product contamination with prohibited substances is possible.
- **Assess the Need** – Consult an SENR registered nutritionist or medical professional who has knowledge of the nutrition needs and anti-doping regulations of athlete. In the case of elite athletes: consult programme appointed practitioners.
- **Assess the Risk** – Batch-testing risk minimisation programmes such as Informed-Sport should be utilised. Check batch numbers against the database and record batch numbers of all products used.
- **Assess the Consequences** - An athlete may receive a ban for up to four years for presence of a prohibited substance in their doping control sample.

Other useful links:

- UKAD Supplements <https://www.ukad.org.uk/supplements-hub>
- SENr Position Statement on Supplement use in Sport
<https://www.bda.uk.com/uploads/assets/089ba7f7-6eb7-4aa5-9e46f9e78c60e9ed/BDA-SNG-Nutritional-Supplement-Position-Statement-December-2022.pdf>
- Informed-Sport <https://sport.wetestyoutrust.com/>