

Athlete Use of 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, parents and others who may be asked about the use of dietary 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 dietary supplements can contribute to maximising an athlete's performance potential.

Dietary supplements - defined as “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) - Dietary supplements, whether sports, dietary or herbal are products which may contain natural or synthetic ingredients. They are used alongside a normal diet to improve health or enhance sporting performance and can be taken in any form (pill, capsule, powder, drink).

Key principles

- Food first: 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.
- Dietary supplements should only be used under the advice of a SENr (Sport and Exercise Nutrition Register) registered nutritionist or appropriate medical practitioners who have knowledge of the anti-doping regulations that govern sport.
- Dietary supplements are not normally recommended for under 18s unless an appropriate medical practitioner advises use for medical reasons.
- Athletes must take individual responsibility for all substances, including dietary supplements, which they ingest (see further “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 dietary supplements. In particular they should not irresponsibly share products, pressure any other athlete into using dietary supplements, or promote or advocate the use of dietary 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.**

There is no guarantee that any dietary supplement is free from containing prohibited substances due to the following issues that can arise:-

- i. Products can become contaminated with prohibited substances during the manufacturing process;
- ii. The ingredient label on products can be inaccurate (substances may not be listed or listed as a different name to that given on the Prohibited List; and
- iii. Products may be counterfeit.

Therefore, all competing athletes must consider these known risks and their consequences relating to anti-doping before deciding to take supplements. (An athlete may receive a ban for up to four years for a first offence.)

Minimising the Risk and Making Informed Choices

Athletes can take steps to minimise the risk of a doping violation by inadvertent consumption of a prohibited substance through the use of supplements.

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 quality assurance 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 banned 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 buy a new pack. Each batch number of each product/pack an athlete proposes to ingest should be checked.

Additionally, on some occasions, supplement companies have been found to incorrectly or fraudulently use the Informed-Sport logo. As such all athletes should check that the products and batches of supplements they plan to use, have been through the Informed-Sport testing programme by entering the product batch number at www.informed-sport.com.

However, no certification programme can 100% guarantee that a supplement does not contain prohibited substances: there is no guarantee against an inadvertent doping violation and the principle of 'Strict Liability' always applies. Athletes should consider undertaking their own due diligence checks, for example:-

- i. Assess the reputation of the manufacturer (i.e. any previous use of prohibited substances found in other supplements they produce; and
- ii. Marketing claims of products are unrealistic (i.e. weight loss, muscle building and energy claims.)

Athletes should note that if they commit an anti-doping rule violation as a result of consumption of a prohibited substance from a dietary 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
- was the product tested and part of the Informed-Sport 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 drug 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 supplement's benefits to health and performance that sometimes has 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. Again, 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. This mind-set avoids the use of any unnecessary supplements and reduces the risk of an anti-doping rule violation via inadvertent consumption of a prohibited substance.

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

Endorsing Dietary Supplements

If you are approached by the producers of dietary supplements to endorse their products and/or enter into sponsorship agreements with them:

- Conduct your due diligence on the company and their products before agreeing anything: 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 number of characters which can be used.

KEY POINTS FOR ALL ATHLETES

- ⇒ **No guarantees** – dietary 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 of banned substances is possible.
- ⇒ **Assess the need** – consult a SENr registered nutritionist or medical practitioner who has knowledge of the anti-doping regulations that govern sport to help determine if you need a supplement to support your health or optimise performance. In the case of elite athletes: consult programme appointed practitioners.
- ⇒ **Assess the risk** – check supplement contents and use Informed Sport - www.informed-sport.com ; note batch test numbers.
- ⇒ **Assess the consequences** - An athlete may receive a ban for up to four years for a first offence.
- ⇒ **Other useful links**
 - UKAD Supplements <https://www.ukad.org.uk/medications-and-substances/supplements/>
 - SENr Position Statement on Supplement use in Sport <http://www.senr.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/SENr-Supplement-Position-Statement-v-June-2017.pdf>