

Athlete Use of Supplements – British Swimming Guidelines

These guidelines are applicable to all athletes of the five aquatic disciplines who enter domestic and/or international competition at any level of their sport.

Dietary supplements (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).

A high quality diet, together with performance-focused nutritional practices, plays a fundamental role in 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) need to optimize all areas of performance, including training, recovery, injury prevention, diet and mental skills. Clearly, at this level of performance, the use of carefully selected, scientifically proven and quality-assured nutritional supplements can contribute to maximizing an athlete's performance potential.

Supplements and Anti-Doping

All athletes – elite or otherwise - must be aware that the aquatic disciplines are governed by the World Anti-Doping Association (WADA) policy of “**STRICT PERSONAL LIABILITY.**” This means that **EACH INDIVIDUAL ATHLETE** is **SOLELY RESPONSIBLE** for **ANY** substance they consume or that is found in their body, **EVEN IF TAKEN INADVERTENTLY**. The principle of ‘Strict Personal Liability’ is particularly relevant where nutritional supplements are concerned, where the risk of inadvertently consuming banned substances is higher.

Nutritional supplements do not fall under the same strict regulations as pharmaceutical medicines, and as a result, there is an increased risk that products might contain substances which are listed on the WADA Prohibited List for banned substances, as not all products may be listed on the label.

Furthermore, a banned ingredient in a supplement can be listed on the product label under a different name to that given on the Prohibited List.

There are also issues with some supplement products due to low quality control on the production line, which can result in an increased risk of contamination from banned substances. Recent studies of supplements that are widely available to purchase in the UK, Europe and USA have rates of contamination from banned substances of between 10 and 25%¹

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

Minimizing the Risk and Informing Your Choices

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

HFL Sport Science, a leading independent provider of drugs surveillance, doping control and research in sport, operates a quality assurance and certification programme for supplements called “Informed Sport”. The programme, which receives the support of UK Anti-Doping (UKAD), helps athletes to minimize risk by enabling them to make informed decisions.

¹ HFL Sport Science, 2014.

Informed Sport works with nutritional supplement manufacturers which have signed up to the scheme to batch-test products for banned substances on the current WADA Prohibited List. All products which have been batch-tested for banned substances bear the 'Informed-Sport' logo. Any batch-lines found to contain banned substances are withdrawn from the market by the manufacturers. A review of testing results from the Informed Sport programme in 2012 shows that contaminated supplements were identified in 2 out of 2,678 samples tested (0.07%) and those products were withdrawn.

Athletes can check supplement products against batch testing results and note the batch number and analysis certificates using the informed sport website: www.informed-sport.com. Athletes should check batch testing for each individual product and not assume that if one manufacturer's product is safe, they all are.

However, no certification programme can 100% guarantee that a supplement (or any other food or drink) does not contain banned substances: there is no guarantee against an inadvertent doping violation and the principle of 'Strict Personal Liability' always applies.

Seeking Expert Advice for Maximum Performance Benefits

In addition to the risks relating to Anti-Doping, athletes must also consider that the nutritional supplement sector is a large and rapidly growing market (estimated to be worth US\$23 billion), and as such, athletes are frequently exposed to commercial marketing claiming supplements' benefits to health and performance that sometimes have no scientific or clinical basis.

Therefore, all athletes should first and foremost seek to maximize the health and performance benefits of training through recovery methods, diet, injury prevention and mental skill development before deciding to use a supplement. Where an athlete chooses to use supplements, guidance should first be sought from reputable nutritionists, dieticians or medical practitioners in order to carefully select a supplement that has been proven to provide a health or performance related.

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

KEY POINTS FOR ALL ATHLETES

- ⇒ **No guarantees** – supplements come with associated risks: some ingredients may not appear on the label; banned substances may use a different name from that on the Prohibited List; product contamination of banned substances is possible.
- ⇒ **Assess the need** – consult a reputable nutritionist or medical practitioner to help determine if you need a supplement to support your health or optimize 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 and certificates.

As of 1st June 2014, these guidelines supersede the previous British Swimming Supplements Policy.