

THE SPORTS SUPPLEMENT ADVANTAGE

In athletics, the margin of victory can be measured in hundredths of a second or fractions of an inch. This is why throughout history athletes have always looked for a competitive advantage through the use of nutritional supplements. Research has shown that sports supplements are often over used and misused and at many times at toxic levels. There is a huge variety of products on the market including pills, powders, drinks and bars. To help take the guess work out of buying sports supplements, listed below are the top five reasonably priced sports supplements that have been scientifically proven to help athletes gain muscle mass and strength or enhance performance.

1) Multivitamin and Antioxidant Formula

Look for an antioxidant formula that contains vitamins A,C,E, selenium, coenzyme Q10, alpha lipoic acid and n-acetyl cysteine. I recommend capsules over tablets as they are easier to digest and absorb. A multivitamin formula should be free of artificial additives and preservatives.

2) Protein Supplements

An athlete who is training intensely, should be ingesting .7-1 grams of protein per pound of lean body mass. A good protein supplement should be free of artificial flavours and sugar and consist of 100% whey protein that has undergone cold micro-filtration. Protein bars, another good option, should only consist of natural ingredients and be free of modified or hydrogenated oils, artificial colouring and preservatives.

3) Creatine

Creatine is probably one of the most studied sports supplement. Several studies of creatine supplementation have shown significant improvement in short bouts of activities that require high levels of strength and power (bench press, running, and cycling sprints). Creatine supplementation has not been found to enhance endurance activities. Maximum muscle storage of creatine is reached by ingesting 3-5 grams / day for 8 weeks followed by 4 weeks off. A note of caution: some athletes report a higher incidence of muscle cramping while taking creatine.

4) Glutamine

Glutamine is an amino acid found in the muscle cells that plays a major role in fuelling the immune system. Glutamine supplementation has been shown to help prevent muscle breakdown and suppress exercise-induced immune depression. Athletes should take 2-3 grams/day to help reduce muscle breakdown and boost the immune system.

5) Omega 3 Fatty Acids

Omega 3 fatty acids such as those found in cold water fish and walnuts are natural anti-inflammatories. Athletes should consider supplementing with salmon or fish oil to help reduce inflammation and thereby reducing the likelihood of injury and speeding the recovery from injury.

Please remember that supplements do not replace a healthy and balanced whole foods diet consisting of plenty of fruits and vegetables, nuts and seeds and lean sources of protein such as fish and chicken. Water is the drink of choice and your intake should be approximately 50ml per kilogram of body weight per day. For those who are interested in reading more about sports supplements, the book *Sports Nutrition Guide (2002)* by Dr. Michael Colgan is an excellent resource. As with any sport supplementation plan, please consult with your health professional. Dr. Sean Graham is a doctor of chiropractic with a special interest in sports injury prevention and rehabilitation. He is a seven year CFL veteran and Co-Director of Satori Integrative Health Centre. He can be contacted at 604 274 7224 or sgraham88@aol.com.