



The risks of using supplements

Athletes who are liable for drug testing under national or international programs should be especially cautious about supplement use.

Some supplements are prepared in unhygienic conditions and contain toxins that may cause gastrointestinal problems. Others do not contain ingredients – especially the expensive ones – that are listed on the label. Contamination of dietary supplements with substances that may cause an athlete to fail a doping test is widespread – some surveys have suggested that as many as one in four supplements may result in a positive test.

These prohibited compounds have not been declared on the label, so there is no way for the athlete to know that they are present. At present, there can be no guarantee of the purity of any commercial supplement. The only way to be sure is to avoid supplements altogether, but many athletes are unwilling to accept this advice.

The sensible athlete will want to see very good reasons for using a supplement and a very low risk of an adverse test before deciding to use it. There is no evidence that prohormones such as Androstenedione and Norandrostenedione are effective in enhancing muscle mass or strength. These prohormones are promoted for use by athletes and are readily available in shops and via the internet, but there is **a high risk that they will result in negative health consequences as well as positive drug tests.**

Many herbal supplements are claimed to increase testosterone levels and hence have an anabolic action. These include: Tribulis Terrestris; Chrysin; Indole-3-Carbinol; Saw Palmetto; Gamma-oryzanol; Yohimbine; Smilax; Mummio. All of these claims are based on studies in test tubes and none has been shown to work in humans.

Athletes are cautioned against the use of these supplements. **Athletes must be aware of the strict liability principle that makes them responsible for everything they eat and drink.** Ignorance is not an acceptable excuse for a positive doping result.