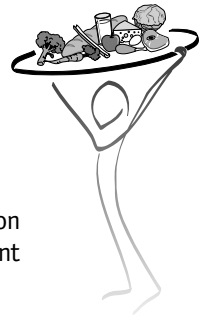


NUTRITIONAL AND DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)



A majority of competitive athletes consume dietary supplements, such as sport drinks, vitamins, minerals, and protein powders without any knowledge of whether these are needed or not. Nonetheless, common questions about supplementation frequently arise from this population. The following five questions address these common concerns about dietary supplement usage, selection, and safety.

Q1: How do I know if I need to take a dietary supplement?

Nutritional and dietary supplements are meant to *supplement* a regular diet with additional nutrients. The only way to precisely know if you need to take a dietary supplement(s) would be to have your current diet assessed. Dietary analysis software programs are available to evaluate your nutrition, such as EATracker on the Dietitians of Canada website. Alternatively, you could consult with a registered dietitian to analyze your nutritional intake to determine if you are in need of supplementing **any part** of your diet.

For more information, check out the following websites and tip sheet:

- www.dietitians.ca/EATracker
- Coaching Association of Canada's [Find a Dietitian](#)
- [From Training Diet to Meal Plans](#) (2006)

Q2: Who is most likely to need a dietary supplement?

Individuals who have dietary restrictions or limitations such as vegetarians, food allergy sufferers, those with celiac disease, "picky" eaters, etc., are those most likely to need a dietary supplement. Others may need to take a dietary supplement because of therapeutic concerns, especially if they have low iron levels, a poor appetite, stress fractures or osteoporosis.

Athletes supplement their diets with hopes of improving energy, exercise recovery, endurance and/or immunity.

However, it is important to assess the quality of your diet before deciding to reach for a dietary supplement.

For more information, check out the following tip sheets:

- [Evaluating Vitamin & Mineral Products](#) (2004)
- [Calcium Counter](#) (2005)
- [Iron Indicator](#) (2005)
- [Vegetarian Ways of Eating: Finding the Nutrients](#) (2005)
- [Evaluating Dietary Supplements](#) (2004)

Q3: I find dietary supplement labels to be confusing. Can I really trust what the label says?

Under Canadian regulations there are two categories of supplements, both commonly used by athletes.

"Nutritional supplements" include food products that are meant to help correct a diet that may be inadequate in energy and/or essential nutrients (e.g., sport drinks for fluid, energy bars for energy, etc.). Nutritional supplements are generally used as food and are therefore regulated by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) through the *Food and Drug Act*. Although the food labels of nutritional supplements have to be approved, the CFIA does not monitor the purity of every nutritional supplement on the market. As a result, there is a risk that a nutritional supplement may not be 100% pure and that it may contain ingredient(s) that are not declared on the food label. Currently, nutritional supplements in Canada are not required to have a DIN (drug identification number) as would a pharmaceutical product.

"Dietary supplements" include vitamins, minerals, herbal and homeopathic preparations. Since January 1, 2004, Health Canada has been implementing new *Natural Health Products Regulations* to regulate the safety, quality, and effectiveness of dietary supplements available to Canadians. As these supplements meet Health Canada's accreditation standards they will receive a licensing number along with a designation such as DIN (drug identification number), DIN-HM (DIN with homeopathic medicine) or NPN (natural product number) to assure consumers that these supplements have met standards for safety, quality, and health claims. However, none of these designations will guarantee that a dietary supplement meets the World Anti-Doping Agency's criteria.

Check out the following tip sheet for more information:

- [Position Statement on Nutritional Supplements](#) (2006)

SNAC Sport Nutrition Advisory Committee
Comité consultatif sur la nutrition sportive



NUTRITIONAL AND DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), page 2

When reading a supplement product label, you will find information to guide you. For example, an ingredient list (in descending order), the “Nutrition Facts” panel, directions or suggestions for use, a lot number, an expiry date, as well as details about the product manufacturer and distributor. While nutritional supplements may not have a DIN, products may claim to be of a particular grade (e.g., Pharmaceutical Grade). Whenever pertinent, the Nutrition Facts will state the % Daily Value of individual nutrients (e.g., carbohydrate, protein, calcium, iron, etc.) relative to the nutrient requirements of an average adult.

Q4: What happens if I’m taking large amounts of vitamins, minerals and/or protein?

The science of nutrition is still evolving. Nutrition experts have established tolerable upper intake levels (UL) for some nutrients. If you are taking one or more supplements that give you a total dosage for a nutrient that is greater than its UL, you may be at risk of adverse reactions. For example, if consuming certain vitamins in excess of your physical needs, you may experience a toxic reaction. If it is a surplus of protein you are consuming, you may be storing this excess as body fat.

Check out the following tip sheet for more information:

- [Evaluating Vitamin & Mineral Products](#) (2004)

Q5: How can I find out if the nutritional or dietary supplement that I have purchased contains any banned or restricted substances that might lead to problems with doping control?

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has produced a list of banned and restricted substances which is available through the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (CCES) in a publication titled “*The Substance Classification Handbook*”.

Compare the ingredient list of a supplement in question to the WADA Prohibited List to see if consuming the supplement may violate the anti-doping rules. However, regardless of whether the ingredient list is accurate, the athlete is ultimately responsible for any dietary supplement that he/she may choose to take.

For more information, check out the following website and tip sheet:

- Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport – www.cces.ca
- [Position Statement on Nutritional Supplements](#) (2006)

The only way to guarantee that a dietary supplement does not contain any banned or restricted substances that would lead to a positive doping outcome is through third party testing.

Currently there are few options for third party WADA supplement testing. The National Sanitation Foundation (NSF) International, a not-for-profit agency in the United States, the HFL company in the United Kingdom, and ConsumerLab.com are presently conducting these tests with select dietary supplements. Following testing protocols, specific batch and lot numbers of successfully screened dietary supplements are posted at the websites of these three organizations. It would then be the athlete’s responsibility to purchase these supplements according to their batch and lot numbers.

For more information regarding the above companies, check out their websites:

- NSF International – www.nsf.org
- HFL – www.hfl.co.uk
- www.ConsumerLab.com

