

Sports Supplements and the Associated Risks

While UK Sport maintains that the safest way to avoid a positive drugs test from a contaminated supplement is not to use supplements, the UK's National Anti-Doping Organisation has developed an educational resource to help the sporting community better understand the risks associated with supplements use and to assist athletes in making informed choices about their dietary needs. While no guarantee can be given about the safety of any supplement, the emphasis of this resource is to manage the risk and minimise the threat of committing a doping violation through taking a contaminated supplement.

There is an array of supplement products available on the market. Athletes have to distinguish between, on the one hand, the supplement products that can produce verifiable benefits not available from eating ordinary foods, and, on the other hand, the supplement products whose claimed benefits are unverified and speculative.

There are a number of difficulties in ruling out the possibility of contamination of a supplement and contamination can occur from several sources. The reality is that the lifestyle, training and competition demands on some athletes may not allow sufficient time to be able to ingest sufficient food to meet energy needs and there may be possible circumstances that necessitate supplement use. Therefore minimising the risk is essential. Although the risk of supplements can be nullified by seeking alternatives through food, avoiding the use of supplements for some athletes is not realistic.

To be sure that supplements do not contain even trace amounts of any prohibited substances it must ensure that:

- A. No prohibited substance can be introduced as a by-product of any part of the manufacturing process
- B. The product (including the raw ingredients) is physically separate from potential sources of contamination at all stages of manufacture, processing, packaging and distribution.

As a minimum, areas that should be assessed as part of the risk management process are:

1. **Assess Efficacy:** Is there valid evidence that the supplement really works? Is it needed if the athlete already has a well-balanced diet? Are the advertising claims substantiated?
2. **Assess Quality Assurance:** Has the product been manufactured, packaged and distributed in such a way that will *minimise* the risk of a contaminated product reaching an athlete?
3. **Avoid** purchasing supplements from a manufacturer who also produces supplements that contain prohibited substances.
4. **Understand** the reason *why* some supplements could contain prohibited substances as contaminants.
5. **Understand what** supplement testing for prohibited substances is.
6. **Seek Expert Guidance** to assess your dietary and performance needs and supplement requirements.

Assessing all these points will help athletes to understand the risks associated with using supplements.

A more thorough checklist of points to assess will be released from UK Sport shortly