

# Understanding Dietary Supplements

*My teammates told me that if I take dietary supplements to gain muscle and recover quickly, I can improve my performance.*

*Do I need supplements? Are there any that are safe, effective and meet NCAA regulations?*

Most athletes consume more than adequate nutrients on a balanced diet. Athletes interested in dietary supplements need to be aware that the risk of contamination and poor manufacturing practices increases the chance of accidentally consuming banned supplements, putting their eligibility at risk.



## WHERE TO START

- A well-designed nutrition plan based on whole foods will safely supply energy and nutrients to fuel your body most effectively for optimal performance.
- When additional nutrition and hydration are needed, first supplement your meals with real food and work with a sports dietician or an athletics healthcare provider to create an individualized nutrition plan.
- Know and adhere to the nutritional/dietary supplement regulations of the NCAA.

If you have questions about a dietary supplement, ask your school's healthcare provider assigned to supplement safety. This is typically a registered dietitian (RD), physician or athletic trainer.



**Sports and Human Performance Nutrition**  
a dietetic practice group of the  
Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics  
**eat right.**



## EVALUATING A DIETARY SUPPLEMENT

- Given the inherent risk of supplement use, student-athletes that choose to use specific dietary supplements may reduce their risk by selecting third-party certified products.
- Each third-party certification program has its own quality assurance process with varying components that include an audit of the manufacturing process, evaluation of product quality, and assurance that the ingredients listed on the label are accurate and do not contain harmful levels of contaminants.
- Ultimately, student-athletes are responsible for everything they ingest. While third-party tested and low-level risk products may be options, complete elimination of risk is impossible. Ultimately, student-athletes are responsible for everything they ingest.
- Your school's healthcare provider can help to ensure that any product you're interested in has undergone some form of third-party certification to minimize risk.
- You should be cautious about claims that are "too good to be true." "Red-flag" terms include:
  - Energizer
  - Fat Burner
  - Metabolic Booster
  - Proprietary Ingredients
  - Testosterone Booster
- Exaggerated claims about energy metabolism, body fat loss and muscle mass gain are especially high risk for containing an undisclosed banned substance.

*Note: The NCAA does not endorse any dietary supplements; therefore, products marketed as "NCAA compliant" have not been reviewed by the NCAA.*

## HOW TO PLAY IT SAFE

- Eating real food, training responsibly and getting enough rest leads to success without the potential consequences of taking dietary supplements.
- As an NCAA athlete, it is your responsibility to know what you are putting into your body!
- Before consuming any supplement, first review the label with the appropriate athletics department staff.

## KNOW THE FACTS!

- There is no assurance of a product's purity, safety or effectiveness. Manufacturers of dietary supplements **are not** required to obtain premarket approval from the Federal Drug Administration (FDA). Therefore, there is no assurance of a product's purity, safety or effectiveness.
- A dietary supplement **may** contain a banned substance, even if not listed, due to contamination or poor manufacturing practices.
- A positive test for some banned substances can result in suspension from competition for a minimum of 365 days and the loss of a year of remaining eligibility.
- NCAA policies regarding nutritional supplements:
  - **Permissible:** can be provided to student-athletes by athletics department.
  - **Impermissible:** cannot be provided to student-athletes by athletics department.
  - **Banned:** substances banned for use by student-athletes.

## FOOD FIRST

Your nutrition plan should ensure adequate and consistent energy across the day, incorporating a variety of nutrient-dense foods and hydration.

- Consume a meal or snack every 3 to 4 hours to maintain stable blood glucose levels.
- Fuel and hydrate before, during and after training.
- Choose a variety of nutrient-dense food options. A balanced diet including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, low-fat dairy, lean protein sources and healthy fats is encouraged to supply the full spectrum of macronutrients (energy, protein, carbohydrates and fats) and micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) used by the body.

While a food-first approach is the preferred strategy, some supplements and sports foods may provide a small but valuable contribution to health and/or performance.

